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AN
INQUIRY
INTO THE
FOUNDATION, EVIDENCES, AND TRUTHS
OF
RELIGION.

By HENRY WARE, D. D.,

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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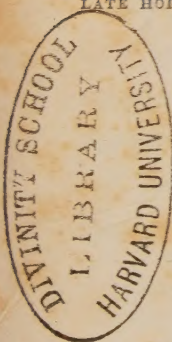
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NOTICE.

THESE volumes are selected chiefly from the manuscripts which constituted a part of one of the series of discourses, which were delivered by the Author in the Chapel of Harvard College, while he was Professor of Divinity in that Institution. About six years ago his sight began gradually to fail, which made it necessary for him to withdraw by degrees, and at length, wholly, from the duties of his office.

To relieve himself from the tediousness of a useless and inactive life, he was advised to prepare for publication, some of the discourses, which he delivered in the regular discharge of his duty. The volumes here presented are the result.

Cambridge,
January 12, 1842.

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ERRATA.

- Vol. I. p. 8, l. 6, for otherwie read otherwise
p. 15, l. 14, " or read for
p. 28, l. 2, " Irquirer read Inquirer
p. 280, l. 29, " thep unishments read the punishments
- Vol. II. p. 4, l. 29, " atheistic read a theistic
p. 39, l. 9, " . And read , and
p. 71, l. 15, " bonds read bands
p. 76, l. 18, " where read were
p. 85, l. 30, " alliance read allegiance
p. 93, l. 11, dele of his being
p. 169, l. 14, for discourse read chapter
p. 187, l. 16, before which insert of
p. 204, l. 31, for man read means
p. 218, l. 30, for abors read labors
p. 238, l. 1, for lecture read chapter
p. 273, l. 3, before enter insert to

AN INQUIRY.

PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS.

IN entering on the inquiry before us, there are several statements which may serve in some measure to prepare the mind for the clear understanding of the subject upon which it is to be employed.

In the first place, what is meant by Religion, and what by the Truth of Religion. For there is usually, I apprehend, a degree of looseness in the popular use of these words, — a want of definiteness in the meaning annexed to them.

By religion then, when we are inquiring into its truth, we mean that obligation under which an intelligent and moral being lies to the author of its existence.

When we speak therefore of inquiring as to the Truth of Religion, we mean an inquiry whether there are any such relations; and whether there be any ground for asserting that there is, in the nature of man and his relation to God, any foundation for regarding man as existing in a state of Religion.

Then again, whether in the sense thus explained, there be ground for asserting the Truth of Religion,

that is, that man does stand in such relation to God, as to be bound by the duties of Religion.

It will next become an important question, — by what process of investigation the knowledge is acquired, that man is thus in a state of Religion.

Is this foundation of religion discoverable by the Light of Nature, — or are we assured of this fact in our nature and condition only by Revelation ?

How far we are indebted to either or to both of these sources of knowledge for all that we know or believe on this subject, must make a very deep and interesting portion of our inquiry. For it is one on which there has been, and not without some good reason, a great diversity of opinion among those, who have thought and examined most carefully on the subject.

While some maintain that all, that we know of God and our relation to him, is derived from Revelation, others hold the opinion, that the Light of Nature alone is a sufficient guide both of Faith and Duty.

There is another thought, which it may be well for us to carry in our minds, as we pursue these inquiries. It is this, that none of them terminate in the Truth itself, which we are seeking, — or are pursued chiefly for the sake of that individual truth. But all have a further aim, and derive their highest value, not from the abstract truth they establish, but from the moral duty of which they lay the foundation.

With these preliminary thoughts in the mind we are prepared to commence our Inquiry.

INTRODUCTION.

STATE OF MIND.

SECTION I.

RELIGION AN INTERESTING SUBJECT OF INQUIRY.

THE manner, in which all inquiry on the subject of Religion should be conducted, cannot be better expressed than it was by the great Jewish Lawgiver, when, at the close of his ministry and his life, he directed the attention of the people of Israel to the Laws and Institutions, which he had in charge to give to that Nation. “And he said unto them, set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day : For it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life.”

In this manner could the Jewish Lawgiver pronounce the value and importance of the laws and institutions, which he had in charge to give to the nation of Israel. Thus could he confidently claim their most earnest attention to the subject as to one, which involved their highest interests. “Set your hearts to it — for it is your life.”

Now, can any language be better suited to give a proper direction to our thoughts in discussing the great topics of religion ?

For, whatever respect was due to the instructions given by Moses, was also due to the instructions given by God in other modes of communication, whether by the Light of Nature, or by the ministry of any other Messengers.

But if such expressions as these were applicable to those instructions, which were given in that infancy of the world ; with how much greater force and propriety may the same be said of that whole combined knowledge which may now be drawn from the book of nature, the writings of Moses and the later prophets, and the Christian Scriptures!—If of the former, how much more of the latter may it be said, “Set your hearts unto all these words, for it is not a vain thing unto you, because it is your life!”

In order to satisfy ourselves how these inquiries ought to be regarded by us, we have only to consider how the mind would be affected, were it possible for us to come to the contemplation of all that is now presented to our view in the Universe, at once, and without any previous preparatory notice.

Let us then imagine ourselves, with all our senses in their full exercise, and our faculties in their maturity, to have just opened our eyes for the first time on those objects and scenes in the midst of which we are placed. We find ourselves surrounded with wonders. By the splendor of the great objects in the heavens above, and the milder beauties reflected from innumerable objects with which the earth around us is covered, we are filled at once with delight and surprise, and our curiosity is excited to eager inquiry, *whence* this beau-

ty and order — these various but regular motions, — these mysterious but useful influences — these surprising analogies and correspondences — these exact adaptations and nice dependences — this subserviency of a vast and complicated machinery, in which the more we examine the more do we find above our comprehension, subserviency to wise and beneficent purposes — this gradation of being, from inert matter, through countless degrees of vegetable and animal life, up to that high intelligence, and power of moral perception, which we find in ourselves — and the relations of usefulness and dependence which run through the whole, and bind each to every other? Whence and how came I myself by the power of perceiving all this — by faculties to discern and to comprehend so much, and to perceive that there is so much more that I cannot comprehend?

Is this curiosity less reasonable, are these inquiries less suitable, because the whole of this scenery has become familiar, because it presented itself to our infant and unformed faculties, and has lain before us so long, and met our eye so often, that we cease to receive from it the same strong impression, and it ceases to excite in us the same lively emotion as when it was new?

It is not reason and philosophy, but ignorance and dulness, that feels no interest in inquiring for the author and cause of all that we see and all that we enjoy, that can feel indifferent whether the whole be referred to blind chance, or considered as the production of an intelligent and designing cause, or

that all things have existed always as we see them now, that is, that the whole is eternal, of which we see that each and every part is temporary and transient.

Again; I find myself capable of various degrees of enjoyment and suffering, and the whole constitution of things, the objects and relations in the midst of which I am placed, so contrived as to contribute either to the one or to the other. Much, indeed a large proportion of each, I find to depend upon myself; that every interest is greatly affected, accomplished by prudent exertion, or lost by careless negligence. I find myself also possessing a moral nature, a power of distinguishing between right and wrong, a natural disposition to approve the one and condemn the other both in myself and others, and a strong sense of accountableness for all those actions, which partake of a moral character.

Can any questions be more interesting and momentous than those which relate to these natural sentiments, whether they be correct or fallacious — whether the perceptible connexion there is between our conduct and character and our condition be accidental or designed, — altogether fortuitous or a part of an established scheme; whether we are the children of chance, and our condition the effect of accident, or the subjects of a moral government, accountable for our actions at a righteous tribunal, and to be dealt with according to our deeds? To be indifferent and careless on questions like these, were to forfeit the distinctions and the privileges by which we are thus exalted.

Once more again, we contemplate the condition of man on earth, feeble, fluctuating, mortal, a condition of imperfect happiness, certainly of but partial moral retribution. We are conscious of faculties, which from the shortness of life, and the circumstances of our state, have not their full range; capacities for action, for improvement, and enjoyment, which in many cases are but partially developed, and in none seem to accomplish all the purposes for which they were apparently intended. Our condition is a mixt one, especially is our present term of being of short duration. Death, the lot and the terror of all, cuts us off in the midst of our activity, in the midst of our improvements, in the midst of our unexecuted schemes of future activity, improvement, and happiness. Human nature and human life seem thus to present a strange image of a noble, but unfinished work, of exalted purposes unaccomplished, of sublime conceptions, but incomplete execution.

Religion opens to us the finishing of the picture, perfects what before was left imperfect, and in the doctrine of a future life supplies a remedy for the evils and a compensation for the incompleteness and shortness of the present. Is this a subject on which a wise man will be indifferent? Will he take no interest in the question, whether the hopes religion thus inspires are or are not well founded? Will he turn a listless ear to the discussions which are to confirm or to destroy them?

We proceed a step further. These first principles of religion which have been mentioned, namely, an

intelligent author of nature, a moral government of the world, and a future life of righteous retribution, are so familiar to our thoughts, so suitable to our nature and condition, and to the whole constitution of things about us, and furnish so easy and natural a solution to the greatest difficulties, and otherwise inexplicable mysteries, that we call them the principles and doctrines of Natural Religion, and are ready to consider them as the instructions of unassisted human reason. They are the light of Nature.

But we extend our views a little further, and find ourselves involved in doubts upon this point. *Are* these doctrines the dictate of nature, are they the discoveries of reason? If they be, whence is it that the knowledge of them has been so partial and confined? that so many errors and follies have been mixed with them? that the faith in them has been so feeble and faint, their moral influence so weak, their supporting and consoling power so inconsiderable, in those ages and those regions where they have had no other support than the deductions of reason? In the state of religion in the most enlightened ages before a revelation was given, and the present state in the whole pagan world, we are taught how much mankind needed to be instructed in its first principles, and fundamental doctrines.

How is it that these great truths are so plain and obvious to us? What has removed those doubts which perplexed, and dissipated that darkness, which thus bewildered the wisest and most penetrating of the sages of antiquity? How is it that on

the subject of religion the humblest Christian has clearer and juster notions than many of the wise and the learned among the heathen philosophers? The sacred Scriptures, from which Christians receive their religion, profess to contain a Revelation from God. In declaring to us his will and purposes, they profess to do it with authority. They claim to deliver to us what holy men of God have made known, speaking as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and proving their divine mission by miraculous gifts and powers. In them these doctrines are clearly and distinctly taught, illustrated, and enforced. Other important truths, too, intimately connected with these and closely connected with our highest interests as accountable and immortal beings, are made known. We find in them the sublimest views of the divine character, works, and government; the most rational and probable account of the divine dispensations in the moral world, our relations and duties clearly and faithfully unfolded, and the kind provisions of the Universal Parent and his purposes of mercy and justice in our final destiny distinctly revealed. If these claims of our religion be supported, if the books in which it is contained, are in their origin, their evidence, and authority, what they purport to be, and, as they profess, do give us a revelation from God, our interest in what they teach must be of the most solemn nature, and our duty of listening with reverence to their instructions, unquestionable; and no inquiries relative to their evidence, or their meaning, can be uninteresting.

But as to their meaning, on many important points, Christians have not agreed. By those who equally acknowledge their truth and decisive authority, they are differently understood and interpreted. Christians are divided into numerous sects, holding various and opposite opinions. Those opinions in which they differ are not always, perhaps not usually, important ; they are seldom, I will not venture to say that they are ever, fundamental. Yet it cannot be denied that some of them are of real importance and must materially affect both our motives of action, and our estimate of duty, and thus be very different in their practical tendency. So far they may be expected to engage our attention and interest our feelings, as inquiries, useful to fix and determine our own views of truth and duty. But they offer, besides, a subject of interesting speculation in the intellectual and moral phenomena which they present. Besides the higher interest we feel in ascertaining what is the truth between contending opinions, we search with eagerness for their causes. We wish to account for their existence. What difference in the original structure of different minds, what variety of natural temper and disposition, what difference in the adjustment and balance of the passions and affections, what early associations, what previous influence of education to give a particular bias and direction to the mind, what accidental causes to give a particular cast of temper or thought, can have produced effects so opposite, can have led to such contradictory conclusions, can have drawn such opposite systems from the same Books.

SECTION II.

NO REASON FOR ENTERING ON THE INQUIRY WITH A WISH
TO FIND ITS CLAIMS WITHOUT FOUNDATION IN TRUTH.

Nothing would seem more reasonably to be expected, than that a subject so interesting as religion presents to the contemplation of man, would engage the earnest attention of every one. Yet we find it far otherwise. Strange as it may seem to the pious and reflecting, there are those who will not seek after God ; who indeed practically say to him, “ Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” Let us then examine, whether there be any just grounds for entertaining dispositions and indulging wishes hostile to religion, unfavorable to its claims, and with wishes to find them unfounded.

The great truths of religion, comprehending all the rest, are the Being of God, a moral government exercised over men, and a future life of righteous retribution. Now that prejudices against such a scheme, leading men to reject it without a fair and full examination of its evidences, are highly unreasonable — that there are, on the contrary, good reasons, why we should enter on the inquiry respecting its foundation at least without any hostile dispositions, will appear whether we consider its aspect,

1st. On individual character and happiness, or

2d. On the social state.

In the view, which is now to be taken, it is easy to be seen, that the question, whether religion or

atheism be preferable, and we have reason to inquire concerning the truth of religion with prepossessions favorable or unfavorable to it, will turn on the nature and the supposed efficacy of the different motives by which they operate on the actions of men, and produce their effects on the human character and condition. Nor will the result be materially affected, whatever be our theory, as to the degree, in which motives direct, restrain, or control the human will. For, whether we suppose those motives to produce their effects in the same manner, and with the same certainty, as mechanical powers operate on mere matter; or that man has a power of resisting to a certain degree, and modifying their operations, so as to make a specific difference between the production of physical and moral effects; none will deny that their power is great, and that the whole of human life is mainly affected by them. Whatever freedom of the will, and power of choosing between, or setting aside motives, or suspending choice be claimed, — the general effect of placing before men motives of different degrees of weight, will by none be called in question.

Let us then consider what must be the different motives to the action of which the practical Theist and Atheist are exposed. Let us examine what different practical results might be expected from the different views of him who does, and him who does not, believe that there is an intelligent creator, and moral governor of the world, that the present life is a state of probation, and that there will be after it a state of

just retribution, in which the moral scheme here begun will be completed.

I shall confine the comparison to a very few of the most obvious circumstances of difference. What then are the motives of action, by which the Atheist and the man of religion are distinguished from each other; to which the one is a stranger, and which may be expected to operate on the other with prevailing effect?

1. Religion, in the first place, holds up to view a sublime example of absolute moral perfection, — far indeed above human attainment, yet adapted to inspire admiration, and to awaken in every breast the desire of imitation. For who can contemplate exalted excellence, and not feel some wish to resemble it? But Atheism presents no such image to elevate the soul and to warm the heart. Capricious chance, inexorable fate, a blind, unintelligent nature, — these have nothing in them to raise one noble sentiment, nor to excite one generous desire.

2. Religion, again, discovers to her children a parent of the universe, almighty, most wise, and beneficent, delighting in the good of his creatures, showering down blessings upon them; receiving in return their expressions of gratitude, filial affection, and reverence, and accepting and rewarding their ready submission to his authority, and cheerful obedience to his will. While Atheism sees only a fatherless world, acknowledges no obligations, and feels no sentiment of gratitude or affection for constant mercies, and holds itself amenable to no authority, and subject to no control.

3. To the eye of Religion there is ever present an omniscient witness of the thoughts and purposes of the heart, to restrain and to guide, when no other witness is present,—in the darkness of midnight, in the privacy of retirement, when no human eye can behold. But no such unseen witness presents himself to the imagination of the Atheist. In him no secret inspection, no invisible scrutiny excites the blush of shame, or the terror of conscious guilt.

4. Religion, once more, contemplates a righteous moral government, an impartial judge, and a future retribution, by which men shall finally receive according to their true character and desert. But Atheism sees nothing beyond the present life as the object of hope or the ground of fear. Satisfied with the cheerless prospect of an eternal slumber in the grave, it draws no motives of action from that world, which lies beyond its confines.

5. In fine, consider the Atheist and Theist in their different views of the nature and destiny of man, and think how widely different must be the practical effects of those views. He, who believes himself to have been brought into being without design, soon to return again, and with the loss of his conscious being, to mingle with the original elements, can attach but little importance to the part he here performs. The purposes for which he has to provide are transient and trifling. Regardless of the past, and engaged by no distant future prospect, the present scene must bound his view, and occupy his entire attention. With views so narrow, debasement of nature must be

the consequence. No scope will be found for that elevation of character, and those extended and comprehensive views, which distinguish the Theist. He is conscious of a nobler origin, and a higher destination. He believes that he is designed for important purposes, in the vast scale of being with which he is connected ; and that he has a part of unspeakable interest to perform on the boundless theatre of action, in which he is placed. He believes himself to be though a small yet not an insignificant part of the universe. Finding in himself faculties of an exalted kind, improvable to an indefinite degree, he believes that an adequate state of being and of action is provided for him, suited to develope them to their full extent, and to give them full scope. Above all, he feels the worth of his intellectual and moral nature, and a sentiment of high elevation is raised, when he contemplates his relation to the infinite and eternal being ; a being, who is a father and benefactor to him through the present life, and who, he is assured, will not forsake him, nor lose sight of him, when his mortal part shall moulder in the dust.

These are a few of the many advantages, by which religion is distinguished as a practical principle. And has the Atheist anything peculiar to his scheme, on the other hand, which he enjoys as a compensation for the absence of those high motives of conduct, in which it is thus deficient ? Has he others of equal efficacy to supply their want ?

There are indeed other motives of virtuous action, besides those which belong exclusively to religion ;

yet they are all such, as religion allows, and such, as the man of religion may be supposed to feel at least in equal degree with the Atheist. But these motives, compared with those that are peculiar to religion, are for the most part feeble, or of uncertain efficacy.

Let us instance in a few.

1. Will the mere fitness of things, — will the abstract beauty of virtue prove alone a counterbalance to the appetites of the animal nature, and the strong passions of the human breast? Speculations of this kind may pleasantly occupy and amuse in the closet the hours of philosophic leisure; but how inadequate to the security of virtue will they be found in the real scenes of active life! Few indeed are the minds, and those only of the most contemplative cast, and least exposed even to the common temptations of life, on which such speculations alone will have any sensible, practical effect; and even on those few they will often be found totally inadequate to the control of the passions, and the conduct of life. This beauty and fitness of virtue is then only perceived to possess an obligatory force, when it is known to be the law, and to express the will, of the sovereign of the world.

2. The true interests of the present life may perhaps be thought to furnish an adequate motive to right conduct, without recurring to a moral government of the world, and a future life of just retribution.

But will men be generally ready to submit to the restraints, which even the rational pursuit of their

present interest imposes, and to practise the self-control that it demands? Will they choose the course which ensures the greater, in preference to that which promises the more immediate good? Will not indeed the judgment itself be misled, and a wrong choice be the result of a false estimate? Is it not at least questionable, whether, on the principle of Atheism, it can be perceived, that virtue is certainly on the whole a man's interest? It may undoubtedly be seen, that universal virtue would promote universal good, and the good of each individual; but in a mixed scene, like the present, where there is a perpetual conflict of contending influences, and the natural tendency of virtue is counteracted in a thousand ways; it may be impossible for him, whose view extends no farther, to discern the certain and universal coincidence of virtue and the true interests of this life. It may indeed sometimes seem to him, whose view is thus confined, and who has no notion of a righteous moral government, that a course of virtue is even hostile to his present interest; and that he, who has shaken off its restraints, and is no longer bound by its laws, proceeds to the attainment of his purpose by a quicker at least, if not a surer and safer progress. He will at least see, that, in accomplishing the purposes of human policy, a total destitution of moral principle is sometimes successful, where certain failure and defeat must have followed a regard to the dictates of conscience.

3. Let it now, in the next place, be asked, how far a regard to character, a wish to be thought well

of by mankind, a deference for public opinion, may be expected to ensure a steady course of virtue in him, who is stimulated by no higher motive. That exalted virtues have sometimes this source, and that even an eminent character of virtue may have no other foundation than this, will not be called in question; but from what is it but religion, that this motive has derived its efficacy, where it is thus useful? Is it not in the exact proportion, in which religion has inspired men with a respect for virtue, that the calculation of character produces this effect? Is it not because virtue has become reputable by means of religion? Will the same take place in a society of Atheists? Now this is obviously but a fair statement of the case, when the question is, whether religion or atheism be more favorable to individual virtue. You are to consider, what would be the influence of any supposed motive on the practice of an atheist, living in a society of atheists. You are to consider, not what respect for virtue he might find it his interest to show, in the midst of a religious society; but what were fairly to be expected of him, living in a community of men like himself.

II. Their respective aspect on individual happiness furnishes another ground of comparison.

1. With this view is to be considered the intimate connexion of the happiness of every being, endowed with a moral nature, with its moral taste and character, and how certainly, though not always in equal degree, that which advances the one serves to improve the other. Now, if virtue be in any degree

more favorable to happiness than vice, and religion be friendly to the advancement and perfection of virtue; in the same degree also must it be promotive of human happiness.

2. Religion again promotes the safety and comfort, and secures the rights of each, by the influence it has over the practice of all. For the man of piety derives advantage, not only from his own religion, but also from that of every one with whom he is in any way whatever connected. Still further, even the Atheist himself is indebted for much of the safety and peace, and for many of the blessings of his condition, to the influence of the religion which he rejects. In controlling the actions and subduing the passions of others; in preventing atrocious crimes by its hold on the consciences of men; in restraining the turbulent, impure, and selfish passions; in controlling by the apprehension of an invisible and omniscient witness the most secret actions, and even thoughts of men; in contributing to domestic peace and social order, religion is the friend of every human being. He who rejects its authority, and denies its truth, has yet reason to bless its power.

These are blessings, which it imparts even to its enemies; for like its great author and object, it has those which descend alike "on the evil and on the good, on the just and on the unjust." For its friends it has also other advantages, of a superior kind, peculiar to them, with which the stranger intermeddleth not. Peace of conscience, satisfaction in contemplating a righteous and merciful government of the

world, filial trust in the great parent and friend of the Universe, cheerful resignation to his disposal, and humble hope of immortality — these are advantages, important in their nature, certain in their event, and they belong exclusively to the practical Theist. They are what the Atheist must utterly disclaim.

III. I shall now proceed to the third and last ground of comparison, and inquire what reasons a man may have for looking with favor on the doctrines of religion, and entering without any hostile prepossessions on the examination of its truths, on account of its effects on human society; its tendency to promote or obstruct the safety, peace, and general welfare of communities.

1. The general tendency of virtue to promote the public as well as private good, I trust will by none be made a question. None will say that justice, temperance, and veracity in each individual member have no direct tendency to the good of the whole community; that conjugal and parental fidelity, the offices of good neighborhood, and the general character of virtue in social and domestic transactions, and in all the business and relations of life do not constitute essential ingredients in the public welfare. It will not be doubted, that a state of society, in which such virtues prevail, is far preferable to that in which the opposite vices bear sway.

Whatever then has a tendency beyond anything else to produce such a state, whatever lays the most powerful restraints on the appetites and passions of individuals, and serves to promote the kind and be-

nevolent affections, and the practice of the personal, domestic, and social virtues, may be viewed as most friendly to human society. Now all this does religion in the most eminent degree. Even in its worst state, mingled with all the absurdities, and encumbered with the superstitious rites of pagan worship; and polluted by all the corruptions, by which ignorance or worldly policy have in the darkest ages defaced it in Christian countries, it has still been auspicious in its influence, still highly favorable to individual virtue and the public welfare, compared with the philosophy, which excludes the doctrine of a moral government of the world.

Again, besides the direct effects of the fear of God and the expectations of a future life, in promoting the public good by means of individual virtue, it has an indirect and instrumental influence, which is to be taken into the account. In whatever form religion appears, it is to be considered also, as a system of education. It operates on the public morals by a variety of means, which it employs. By its institutions for instruction and devotion it serves to form the general character, and contributes in no small degree to the public welfare.

2. Nor is this beneficial influence of religion on communities the opinion only of those, whose notions of the power and tendency of religion are drawn from their experience of a more pure and perfect scheme, than reason can attain without the aid of revelation. Philosophers, Statesmen, and Legislators of all ages have clearly expressed what was their esti-

mate of the value of religion to communities, by the place they have assigned to it in all their civil institutions. They have been able to rely on no other security for the fidelity of the magistrate, and the obedience of the subject, and to find no other sure basis either of public or private virtue, than religious faith and principle. To bind to their duty by the strongest ties those, to whom the public interests are entrusted; and especially to enable courts of justice to depend on the truth of testimony, mankind have resorted to the sanction of an oath. But the obligation, which this imposes, will be felt only by him, who believes in a God of truth, and a righteous government. For the Atheist, it appeals to an authority which he disclaims, to a providence, which he denies, to a future retribution, the notion of which he derides as a vulgar superstition. In a society of Atheists then, that bond, which holds together the social body, and which is indispensable to the administration of justice in the most important transactions, and affords the best security, that human wisdom has yet discovered, of veracity and fidelity in the magistrate and subject, in the judge, the jury, and the witness, must have lost entirely its force. And by what substitute, let me ask, shall the same purposes be answered? It is not easy to say. For that part of human conduct, for which it chiefly provides, is beyond the reach of ordinary means. It is exposed to no inspection but that of omniscience, and can be acted upon by no human rewards or punishments, hopes or fears.

But I need not dwell on this topic. It is by the enemies of religion themselves more than conceded. This very circumstance, to every fair and reflecting mind so honorable to religion, so far from being called in question, has been urged as its reproach, and a reason for its rejection. This unequivocal testimony of worldly politicians to its usefulness has actually been turned into an argument against its foundation in truth. Because religion has so constantly made a part of the civil policy of nations, and the legislator and magistrate so constantly acknowledged its value and applied its power, it has been alleged, that it is the mere creature of human policy, the invention of statesmen for the support of government, a device to which the founders of civil institutions have resorted, from the persuasion, that these institutions admitted of no adequate support, but from a divine authority, and sanctions drawn from the future and invisible world.

But shall we indolently adopt a conclusion thus carelessly drawn? Because religion has been honored and employed by politicians, does it follow, that it must have been invented by them? A fairer presumption than this would seem to be, that what was confessedly so indispensable to human society must have had a higher origin, than the craft of human politicians; and a course, correspondent to this, would be to institute a faithful examination into the evidences of its origin and its truth.

For, do we find any other analogous case, in which the constitution of things is such, that we are obliged to have recourse to falsehood for the support of truth,

to resort to false principles for the promotion of right and beneficial ends? Can another instance be produced in the whole compass of human experience and observation, in which that, which is on the whole useful, is not also true? where principles or maxims, whose tendencies are clearly to a beneficial result, are not also correct?

As far as our knowledge extends, the system of things is carried on, and the ends of the universe are accomplished, not by deception, but reality. Is it credible, that in this instance, in a question that involves the highest interests of the intelligent inhabitants of this world, we shall meet with something the reverse of this? Is it credible, that we shall find the great principles of religion practically true, but speculatively false? That the opinion of a God, a moral government, and a future state of retribution, are of the utmost practical importance, the only sure foundation of individual virtue and happiness, and of social order, peace, and public virtue, and that the opinions so momentous in their influence and practical importance, are yet utterly without foundation in truth? The supposition is unsupported, and inadmissible.

I shall now confine myself to two reflections resulting from the subject.

1. The first is the duty, which the view, now taken, imposes on us, of yielding ourselves to fair and impartial inquiry, as to the evidence of the truth of religion, and the grounds of its obligation.

On a subject of no practical importance we might

be allowed to be indifferent ; but where the most momentous interests are in question, and these, not of an individual but of a whole race of beings, and not for a short term only, but for interminable ages ; to be careless and unconcerned were to act in a manner unworthy of our rational and immortal nature.

To prepare us for that fairness of inquiry, which may be expected to result in truth, no opposing interest, nor hostile prejudice, must be allowed a place in the heart. Corrupt principles or affections occupying the mind will prevent the reception of truth. Consciousness of a wicked life will hate the light, which threatens to expose it, and dread the power, that is able to punish it. And that pride, which disdains to see, to think, and to act with the multitude, unfriendly to a faithful search, and willing reception of the truth, will induce you even to close your eyes, and turn away from that light which shines on all.

The good man, it is easily perceived, can have no reason for wishing that religion were not true. Nor has the determined sinner so just cause, as he may imagine, to shut his eyes against its evidence, because it is his enemy. He may thus avoid the uneasiness of an unwelcome truth, but the light which he seeks to exclude will not therefore cease to exist. The God, whom he refuses to see, will still exist and continue no less the unseen witness of his life.

But even admitting, that instead of that ignorance of God, in which he wishes to remain, he could be assured that there were none ; would that assurance relieve him from all apprehension of anything beyond

the present life ? With the exclusion of an intelligent and moral governor of the world, must all the hopes and fears of a future existence be necessarily removed ? Is there any greater difficulty, on the scheme of Atheism, in believing there will be a future life, than in accounting for the present ? Some power he must admit, by whatever name it be called, whether chance, or nature, or fate, which has brought him into being. The same power, for aught he can know to the contrary, may continue his being, or restore it again after it has been suspended by death. The latter is not a greater, nor a more incredible event than the former. Under the operation of this power, whatever it be, he now finds himself capable of high degrees both of enjoyment and suffering ; can he be sure, that the same power may not extend it to a future life ? In the present state of things, he witnesses the clear and certain indications of a moral government, a prevailing tendency of virtue to happiness, and of vice to misery, sometimes indeed counteracted, but in many instances taking effect to a very great degree ; it is more, than he can possibly assure himself of, from experience and observation, the only sources from which his conclusions are to be drawn, that a state of things will not succeed the present, in which these tendencies, unobstructed, will come into full effect. Is it possible for him to say, that the same chance or course of nature, which has placed him here, in a state in which the lot of men is adjusted in so great a degree according to moral distinctions, may not hereafter remove him to another,

where this adjustment shall be perfect ; where the happiness of good men shall be certain and complete ; and more awful and tremendous sufferings shall fall to the share of the wicked ?

CHAPTER I.

WITH WHAT EVIDENCE OUGHT THE INQUIRER TO BE SATISFIED ON THE SUBJECT OF RELIGION?

THIS is a question of more practical importance, probably, than is generally apprehended. Men are skeptical on the subject of religion, or their faith is feeble and mingled with doubts and uncertainty, not for want of sufficient evidence, but because they have not considered what kind of proof the subject admits of, and what degree of evidence ought to satisfy a fair inquirer. This state of mind is, perhaps, partly induced by a circumstance, which is in other respects of great value to us; I mean the time and manner in which religion is first presented to us. It is our privilege, and one of inestimable value we ought to esteem it, to receive its truths by early education. We draw in its great and momentous doctrines with our first instructions. The mind is formed, the character is shaped, the course of life receives its direction from it, even before we are capable of understanding its nature, or of having any distinct knowledge, or making any correct estimate, of the evidence upon which it rests.

But this advantage is not pure and unmixt. It is balanced in some measure by an attendant disadvantage. For our religion, pure and perfect as it is in itself, thus comes to us at first debased in a greater or less

degree by its mixture with human corruptions. When afterwards, therefore, at a mature age, what was at first received upon trust becomes a subject of examination, and we have occasion to look into the grounds of our faith, we proceed under the disadvantage that arises from a disposition to skepticism, which is produced by a discovery of what is false and erroneous in the views that had been received upon authority. And under the influence of the prejudice thus excited, there is danger that we shall demand too much, and insist on a kind of evidence or degree of proof, which the subject does not admit. Against such an influence it is important that we should be placed upon our guard.

It is doubtless a wise and kind provision of heaven in the constitution of things, that our faith should thus stand at first upon authority alone. But it cannot be imagined to be the design of heaven, that it should continue to rest on no other foundation. When afterwards, therefore, we seek other support, much depends upon our knowing with what kind of support we ought to be satisfied.

Nothing can be more clear, than the right, which each one has to know the certainty of that, which is proposed as the object of faith ; yet he is required to make a reasonable use of that right. He is justly expected to pursue his examination with fairness, and to accept of such kind of evidence, and to rest satisfied with such degree of proof, as the subject will admit of, and not to require that, of which it is not capable.

Now religion in general, and Christianity in particular, is offered to us only upon the ground of moral evidence. It can be offered to us upon no other ground. Its truths are proper objects of faith ; and I shall endeavor to show, that, proposed as they are, they are the object of a reasonable faith, and not liable to objection ; in the first place, because they stand on the same ground, in this respect, with other truths, which are received without hesitation, and upon which we act in the ordinary business, and in the common interests of life ; and in the next place, because from the very nature of religion it were to be expected, that they would be presented upon such evidence, and such only.

Now with respect to other truths, which are most firmly believed, and upon the faith of which we feel ourselves fully authorized to act, where even great interests are depending ; how few are supported, or are capable of being supported by any other, than moral evidence ? They have not the testimony of our senses ; they are not subjected to the infallible test of consciousness ; are not susceptible of demonstration. They rest upon human testimony, which, though it may mistake or intentionally deceive, is yet deemed a reasonable ground of faith, where evidence of a different kind is not to be obtained. Or they are grounded upon presumptions, which have singly but little force ; the strength of which may be indefinitely increased by multiplication ; yet can never be so multiplied, as not to be capable of deriving further strength, by being still further multiplied ; or they are

inferences drawn from repetitions of observation and experience, which it is plain can never be so often repeated, that further repetition shall not serve still to strengthen the conclusion. Yet for most of the truths, which we receive with unhesitating confidence, we have, and can have, no better grounds of evidence, than one or the other of these, which have been stated.

We hear of Moscow and Peking, and we read of Jerusalem, and Babylon, and Rome; and we entertain no more doubt of the existence of those cities, and that they answer to the descriptions, which we have had of them, than of the existence of those places, which we have ourselves seen. We hear too, and read of the great events, which are constantly going on in distant parts of the world; nor does it ever enter into our minds to call in question the reality of what is thus reported to us, or the existence of those distinguished personages, who are represented to be the principal actors in the series of public events, because we have no better grounds for our faith, than human testimony.

Who is so skeptical as to doubt, whether there is such a place as Athens, and whether there once lived there such men as Demosthenes and Plato, any more than, at the end of the simplest and plainest mathematical demonstration, he doubts the truth of the result? We read the orations of the former and the philosophical writings of the latter, with unhesitating confidence of their genuineness, and can scarcely distinguish between the assurance we feel, that our mind

is employed upon thoughts, which once passed through the minds of those great masters of Grecian eloquence and philosophy ; and the certainty we feel in the consciousness, that, in this act, we are exercising our own faculties upon those thoughts. Nor, where they purport to be treating of real persons and transactions, do we any more doubt the reality of the persons whom they introduce, and the facts which they relate, or to which they allude, than we doubt the reality of those, which have once been the objects of our own personal observation, and are now of our distinct recollection.

Historical evidence is naturally, and by general consent is deemed to be, a proper ground of historical faith ; and, in innumerable cases, he that should refuse it, and require other evidence, would be thought to advance very unreasonable claims, and to expect what the very condition of our being, the nature and limits of our faculties, and our relations to the past and the distant, do not admit.

We are supported then in the assertion, that important truths resting on that kind of evidence, upon which religion is offered, are received without hesitation, and make up a large part of human knowledge.

And upon what kind of evidence are men usually called to act in the ordinary business of life ? Upon what evidence do they think it reasonable and safe to proceed ?

In the pursuit of their daily occupations, men act upon the presumption, that the course of nature is

regular and permanent ; that its operations will continue to go on, as they have done ; that the future will resemble the past ; the same causes producing the same effects, and from similar motives a similar course of actions proceeding. Both in the natural and the moral world we make our calculations upon a settled and uniform disposition in the course of things. Yet this uniformity is not perfect, nor is the degree in which it is liable to exceptions fully known. Our expectations, founded on the presumption of a regular and uniform course of things, may be disappointed. In most cases we are obliged to accept of conclusions, which are drawn from an inadequate number of instances ; from observations extremely inaccurate and superficial ; from experience, that is far from complete and satisfactory. We depend upon the conduct of men, and regulate our own with reference to it, upon very imperfect knowledge of their character and dispositions. We rely, in reference to it, upon the operation of principles and motives, of the very existence of which, still more of their strength, we can have but uncertain proof ; and which are besides liable to be counteracted by opposite ones.

Nor is it only in bold and rash adventures ; in daring and intrepid deviations from the common track of business, that this takes place. It occurs in the most regular, safe, and common occupations. In the daily business of life we think it right and prudent to act, as if we had absolute certainty, where we have in fact nothing more, and perhaps even something less, than a high degree of probability ; and we must

proceed to act, if we will act at all, upon evidence, which leaves doubtful to a great degree the propriety, the tendency, and the result of our conduct.

In what manner, again, are we accustomed to seek and secure our worldly interest ; and upon what kind of evidence are we willing, and do we think it safe to rely, in pursuing it ? That we have any interest in all that is before us, is neither intuitively certain, nor capable of demonstration. We learn, that we have such an interest depending, by a course of moral reasoning. It is an induction from several particular things. It is an inference from our own past experience, and from the observation and experience of others. Hence our expectations of the future, and our provisions for it. Our foresight is the result of calculations from the past, and is more or less perfect, according to the extent of our inquiries, and the care and fidelity with which they have been conducted. Upon such information is all the business of the world conducted, and all its interests are pursued.

We rely on the regular and stated order of things, and presume, that what has usually happened will happen again in similar cases. We depend also on the general truth of human testimony, believing that we shall find the actual state of things, in any given case, substantially what it has been represented to be.

The husbandman expects the seasons to return in their usual order of succession, accompanied with their usual characteristics, and commits his seed to the ground in the spring with the hope of harvest in autumn ; and plants in his youth the tree, that is to

yield fruit to his old age ; nor is deterred from either the one or the other by a consideration of numberless contingences, which may defeat his hopes, and render his labor useless.

The merchant, relying on human testimony, ventures his property abroad, sends it to distant countries, which he has never visited, and exposes it, and his person also, to winds and seas, the character of which he has learned not from his own personal observation, but from the declarations of others. He is not afraid to put at risk all that he most values, — not his property only, but his safety, his liberty, even his earthly being ; in the confidence, that he shall find the elements upon which he depends to transport him, such as they have been described ; and that the countries which he shall visit, and their climates, the men that inhabit them, and their customs, manners, languages, wants, and dispositions, will answer to what he has been told respecting them.

In the most ordinary transactions in our social intercourse, what have we to serve as a foundation for mutual confidence, but the credit which we give to human testimony ? And on what do we place dependence respecting the conduct of others, or the result that is to follow from the course of life, which we pursue ourselves, but calculations founded on experience, which may yet be fallacious ; inferences drawn from the past, which we have learned to apply to the future ?

How readily does every man, notwithstanding the risks to which it is exposed from imperfection of

knowledge and imperfection of virtue in the judges, submit his cause to the decision of a court of justice ! Not only our property do we deem it safe thus to place at the disposal of others, but what is dearer, our liberty, our reputation, and our lives.

When sick, will you make no exertions for the recovery of health, because none can be made with the certainty of success ? Will you apply no remedy for the disease, because none is infallible ? Will you ask no aid of the physician, because his skill is imperfect, and because the remedies, which he shall prescribe, will be of uncertain efficacy, liable to be misapplied, and when misapplied, liable to increase the disease instead of giving relief ?

In poverty, do you cease from exertion to improve your condition, and make no endeavors to extricate yourself from embarrassment, because whatever efforts you may make, they may fail of being successful, and even become instrumental in involving you in deeper ruin ?

The food, which you shall take to allay the suffering of hunger, may generate a fatal disease, or may strangle or suffocate you in the act of receiving it. Will you then abstain and perish ?

The cases might be multiplied without end, in which it is the condition of our being to be thus placed between alternatives, which require our acting upon imperfect knowledge. We are appointed to act, if we will act at all, where certainty is denied us, both as to the prudence and success, and as to the propriety of the course we shall pursue.

Can it be pretended that there is greater uncertainty on the subject of religion, than has just been stated in relation to the common business and interests of life? And if there be not, the reasonableness of listening to its evidence, and attending to its claims will not be questioned, and we must be convicted to our own consciences of a criminal inconsistency, if in such circumstances we are regardless of its claims and reject its evidence.

But there is a further view of the subject, which is not to be overlooked. The evidence of religion, besides being such as we are satisfied with, and constantly act upon in our other concerns, is such as were to be expected from the very nature of religion itself. The nature and design of religion require, that it should be offered upon such and only such evidence, as we are speaking of. Any other than moral proof, any that should force assent, whatever were our will and disposition, as it must level all distinction of character, would be inconsistent with the ends of moral government. But religion necessarily implies moral government. There can be none without it. It implies that we are in a state of trial; of trial, which is both a discipline and a probation of virtue. And it is certain, that so far as religion itself makes a part of our trial, so far as it is presented to us, as a matter of free choice, and we are accountable for our choice, either as respects its reception or its practice, there must be that in its demands, or its evidence, which shall exercise the faculties, and fur-

nish opportunity for the proof of attention and fidelity, and in general, for the manifestation of character.

If the demands of religion be such, as to call for the control of any of the appetites and passions, or the natural affections ; such as to oblige us to forego present for future good ; such as require us to give up that, which is apparent for that, which is real ; and in general compel us to lay a restraint upon our inclinations, and to bend them to a compliance with the will of God, and our sense of duty ; so far have we in the very substance of its duties the elements of our trial.

But all this, important as it is, can hardly be supposed to constitute the whole of the human trial, so exceedingly partial must it prove to be, and unequal in different persons. In some, the conflict between sense and reason, appetite and intellect, passion and conscience, the animal and the rational and moral man, may be severe ; in others it may amount to little or nothing. So exact in some men is the balance of the several parts of the constitution, that as to the external practice of virtue, it scarcely furnishes the occasion of discipline and trial at all. What they need is some trial of a different kind ; something that shall serve as a test of their intellectual integrity ; something that shall furnish the opportunity for manifesting, whether they will with fairness and honesty investigate the grounds of duty, weigh the evidence of truth, and submit to a laborious and patient inquiry, to ascertain what they are to believe, and how it is their duty to act.

Now trial of this kind is furnished by the nature of the evidence, upon which the whole of religion rests. It is the trial of attention to the subject, which is presented to us in such a manner, as cannot but show, that we have a deep interest in it, to be secured by attention, or lost by neglect ; a trial of diligence, that is, whether we will examine the subject so fully, as not to err through carelessness or neglect ; a trial of our fairness and uprightness, ascertaining whether or not we will make an impartial estimate of the value of evidence, and accept and allow its just weight to such, both in kind and degree, as is applicable to the subject, and not requiring that, of which its nature is not susceptible.

This part of human probation, it is apparent, applies in some degree to all men ; but chiefly to those, who are the least affected, and have their fidelity and obedience least exercised by the other and more ordinary circumstances of trial. It furnishes a test also of a higher kind. It gives opportunity likewise for the practice of some virtues, which could not exist, or not in the same degree, if the voluntary powers were more restrained than they are ; especially if their exercise were wholly superseded by irresistible proof. “ It gives opportunity for the exercise and the display of candor, seriousness, humility, patient inquiry, submission of passions, interests, prejudices, to moral evidence and probable truth. Habits of reflection are formed, and that previous desire to learn and to obey the will of God is brought into exercise, which forms, perhaps, the test and

merit of the virtuous principle, and which induces men to attend with care and reverence to every credible intimation of that will, and to resign present advantages and present pleasures to any reasonable expectation of propitiating his favor.” *

We see then the reasonableness and the utility of religion being placed on the ground of moral evidence. More than this also appears. So far as religion consists in a moral probation, it is clear that its very existence depends on this, since it must be wholly destroyed by that, which should make it cease to be a moral trial. But is it not evident, that it must wholly cease to be a moral trial, were its evidence absolutely irresistible? All trial depends on supposed uncertainty of some kind, either as to the evidence of truth or duty, its nature, its obligation, or its consequences. Where there is no room for an unfaithful mind to raise a doubt, there can be no test of its faithfulness. No man ever cast himself from a precipice to prove his disbelief of the existence of the material world; and no man ever felt indifferent about the condition of to-morrow, because he doubted whether, if he then continued to exist, he should have any interest in it.

In the concerns of the present life, it is the degree of contingency, which we find in almost everything, that gives room for the faculties to be exerted, and lays the foundation of all that difference of character, which consists in wisdom and folly; in a pru-

* Paley.

dent attention to present interest, and careless neglect of it. Let there be in all things, as there is in some, absolute certainty, and none of this trial could exist, and none of this development of character take place.

So also in religion. Let there be absolute certainty, — let evidence be irresistible, — let there be no possibility for negligence and carelessness to mistake or be deceived, nor for a dishonest mind to deceive itself; and where would be the test of obedience, where the trial of virtue, where the manifestation of character? The external practice of virtue would be produced; and if this were all that was intended by the moral government of God, its purposes would be fully accomplished. But the external act alone is a mere physical, not a moral effect. It is arresting the arm of the murderer, but leaving his dispositions uncorrected, — his purposes unchanged. It is preventing the deed of cruelty and outrage, but leaving unchecked and unaltered the malignity of the heart, and the depravity of the will. A check is given to the execution of wicked purposes, but the wickedness of the heart remains, disguised perhaps, but not corrected.

So far as religion is a discipline of virtue, and a moral trial; its design being to form a character of moral excellence, and to prove it; so far the means, which it employs, the evidence upon which it rests, the manner in which it is proposed, and the sanctions which it applies, must all be such, in their nature and circumstances, as to consist with freedom of

choice ; such as to make the character and course of life, not a matter of coercion but of free and deliberate preference ; such, in fine, as shall bend the will and guide the heart, establish the principle and form the temper ; so that the external act and the habit of life shall be but the development and outward expression of what is formed within.

CHAPTER II.

SOURCES FROM WHICH THE PROOFS OF RELIGION
AND ITS TRUTHS ARE TO BE DRAWN.

THAT there is such a thing as natural religion, as distinguished from what is taught by divine revelation, seems to be clearly intimated by the sacred writers. For it is asserted by the Apostle Paul, respecting the heathen, "that what may be known of God is manifest in them, because God hath showed it to them." But how has he shown it? The reply is, "The invisible things of God," namely, his being, perfections, and government, "are seen by the things that are made," that is, they are learned from the visible creation. But how much is meant, and what is to be understood in this phrase, is neither here nor elsewhere distinctly defined.

It comprehends what may be known of God, that is, may be known of God by the Light of Nature, without a Revelation. For the writer is speaking of the heathen as distinguished from the only people who professed to enjoy that blessing.

Natural Religion, as distinguished from revealed, has been defined to be that knowledge of God and his attributes, of our duty and our future expectation, which may be acquired by observation on the usual course of nature; Revealed Religion, that knowl-

edge upon the same subjects, which is acquired from interruptions of the usual course of nature by the God of nature. In Natural Religion is then supposed to be comprehended the being of God, including all his attributes, the moral government of God, and a future life of righteous retribution. To these articles may be reduced, and in them included, all that we can know of religion by the Light of Nature.

But when all this is asserted of the Religion of Nature, can it be because that religion, in the sense and to the extent now stated, has been found in all men, or in men of all ages, and of all nations? It will certainly not be found to be true, that a scheme of religion so just or so perfect has always, or usually, if it has even in a few instances, suggested itself to men unenlightened by divine revelation.

In vain shall we look for such a system of doctrine actually reasoned out by the natural powers of man, and received on the evidence of reason alone. The language under consideration will be used with sufficient propriety, if we mean by it not what was actually known on the subject by any of the human race, but only what might have been known by a faithful use of the faculties and the means God has given them. These are evidently very different things. How many things are there in their nature attainable, which are yet never actually attained? Though we find therefore but very little of the knowledge of God and of his providence in many nations, which have never enjoyed the light of revelation, it

will not follow that nature and reason, contained and taught nothing on the subject, but only that men were unfaithful, and failed to make a right use of the powers that were given them. It is enough to give propriety to the use of the language in question, if when we have received the great truths of religion from another source, they approve themselves to our reason.

But besides this mere accordance with human reason, there are considerations which indicate very distinctly, that religion is natural to men; and these truths which have been just enumerated are confessedly the first principles and elements of religion, such as right reason readily approves and embraces. Now if it can be shown by fact or authority, that man is naturally a religious being, disposed by the constitution of his nature to resort to some religion; and further, that men in all ages and nations have actually had some kind of religion, we shall have made some advance toward accounting for and vindicating the use of language in question; shall have approached sufficiently near the point before us, perhaps as near as the case admits.

We go on then with this view to take some notice of the constitution of our nature. And what is it in this respect? By what is man most clearly distinguished from every other inhabitant of this globe? Is it the possession of reason? But will the exclusive claim to reason be undisputed? In some of the animal race appear such marks of intelligence, such indications of thought, memory, design, acting from

motives, and with a view to consequences, as may be thought to render doubtful the exclusive claim of man to the faculty of reason.

But there is another circumstance of distinction, which will not be called in question. It is the moral nature, the capacity for religion and disposition to it. This, as far as appears, is universal in men; but no trace of it was ever perceived in any of the lower orders of creatures. This latter position is not contradicted, as at first it might seem to be, by the language of Scripture in attributing religious faith to the inferior and irrational creatures. When sentiments of religious gratitude, and acts of religious homage are there attributed to the brute creation, it is in the same sense highly bold and figurative, after the Eastern manner, in which they are also attributed to the several parts of inanimate nature. How solemnly are the fields and the trees, the mountains and forests, the earth itself and the heavenly bodies, called upon to rejoice in God, to proclaim his glory and speak forth his praise, as if they were capable of feeling and expressing a religious sense of their dependence on the great Creator! Notwithstanding the application of such expressions, religion, in the proper sense of the term, is peculiar to man. It is also, common to all men. It belongs besides to all periods of time, to all regions of the globe, to every gradation in the intellectual and social scale, from the highest refinement and improvement, to the lowest ignorance and barbarism. If there have been exceptions either of individuals, or of whole societies of men that were

wholly destitute of religion, they have been few and singular phenomena. Like all monstrous productions in the natural world, they have been rare and uncommon. They are not to be urged as exceptions to the universality of religion any more than the case of idiots to that of reason.

To this universality of religion we have what is the best evidence of which the case admits, the testimony of the most learned men of ancient times. The opinion of antiquity with scarcely an exception seems to have been unanimous on this subject ; that the sentiment and the faith of religion are common alike to the Greek and the Barbarian.

The universality of religion has, with nearly equal consent, been conceded also by those who have investigated the subject in modern times. And this is true, as well of those who have not, as of those who may be disposed to have a desire to find an argument for the support of the truth of religion.

As to the origin and source of this universal sentiment, that it is "innate," as contended by some, "the image of Deity stamped on the mind of every human being," that it is perceived by "an internal sense, which is called a sense of deity," has been taught by many both in ancient and modern times. But the opinion is liable to objection, and will probably be generally rejected, as is the metaphysical hypothesis of which it makes a part. It seems indeed a sufficient difficulty in this hypothesis, that such an internal sense, being properly an instinct, must have led men universally to the true and only God ; for it

is found that all instinctive impressions are certain and distinct, as to the objects to which they have respect ; and we can hardly imagine that one so important as this, would have been unlike the rest, vague and uncertain. But men have in fact been led universally, where they have had no light from revelation not to the worship of one God, but of many. The Jews, who received their religion from revelation, were the only nation of antiquity that were not polytheists.

Another origin, and a different one from this, seems to me to be more consistent with that obscurity and error, which, wherever men have been left to the light of nature alone, has mingled itself with this universal sentiment. For although the gentile world is declared to be left without excuse, because, what may be known of God is manifest among them, he having shown it to them ; it is only some essential parts of the divine nature, character, and government, which are thus made known to all ; and this with but little of that clearness and certainty, which those enjoy who are favored with the light of revelation.

I shall endeavor to show, that this manifestation, which God has made of himself to all, must be in some of those things, which are common to all in their nature, their faculties, and their condition as men, and common to the observation and experience of men in every age, of all nations, and of every character.

CHAPTER III.

SOURCES OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH
CONTINUED.

THERE is an incidental and indirect support, fortifying this, to be drawn from a consideration of the origin and source of this supposed universal sentiment. If, for example, as some have maintained, this sentiment be innate, instinctive,—have its origin in a sense of Deity naturally inscribed on the human mind,—that will imply its universality. To this opinion, however, there are strong objections. But this universality will be implied with nearly the same force, if it appear that God's manifestations of himself to men be in things, which are common to all men, in their nature, their faculties, and their condition as men, and common to the notice and experience of men in every age, of all nations, and of every character. That this is the truth of the case I shall now endeavor to show.

I. I observe, then, in the first place, that man is fitted to be a religious being, and that religion becomes, as it were, natural and necessary to him by means of those faculties, which constitute him a reasonable being, a moral agent, and accountable for his actions. Consider his intellectual faculties. View him as a being capable of contemplating the greatness,

variety, and order of the universe, susceptible of strong emotions of wonder and delight from the magnificent, the beautiful, and the useful, in nature, and endued with eager curiosity and strong desire to search into the nature, and to investigate the causes of all that he sees. With all the marks of contrivance, and wise and benevolent design, that are presented in every object, and constantly exhibited to his view, can such a being be imagined to continue long totally ignorant of the creator and contriver of the whole, without any notion of a being or beings, by which the whole was produced?

It has been said, that a capacity for religion, and a propensity or disposition to it, is peculiar to man, and that it is common to all men. The first part of this proposition, that religion is peculiar to man, may be thought to require nothing more than to be simply stated, in order to gain our assent. At least the claim will be made for no other order of beings on our earth. The latter, which asserts its universality, may require to be illustrated. And it will be best illustrated by showing, that the manifestations, which God makes of himself, are in things, which are common to all men, in their nature, their faculties, and their condition as men; and common to the notice of men in every age, of all nations, and of every character.

The notions thus acquired in the unaided exercise of the faculties, would be doubtless indistinct, probably very inadequate and unsatisfactory, and, not unlikely, in some respects erroneous. Yet some apprehension at least of superior beings would be enter-

tained, some notion of man's dependence on a superior power and superior will, and of the homage, duty, and trust, which such relation implies.

II. While his intelligent nature and reasoning faculties thus enable man to look through the works of creation up to the author of nature, there are some circumstances in his situation, which dispose him thus to employ his faculties, and lead him by a strong inclination to give his inquiries this direction ; circumstances which at the same time render religion suitable, and, as it were, necessary to him.

1. One circumstance in the human condition adapted to give a deep sense of dependence, and thus to lead the thought up to a power above, as the object of gratitude, reverence, and trust, is, the manner in which his natural wants are supplied. His own exertions indeed are employed, and such is the constitution of things, that he sees a connexion between well directed exertion, faithful care, and prudent foresight, and the accomplishment of his purposes. Yet even a less degree of intelligence, than belongs to man, would be sufficient to teach him, that neither the power of exertion, which he feels in himself, nor any quality in the things about him, to which he might be disposed to attribute the efficacy of those exertions, is independent. He could hardly fail to perceive that both the one and the other are imparted, not original, inherent, and self-produced.

Innumerable circumstances at every turn, and every moment, tend to force upon him this conviction. In every act he performs, and in every function of his

animal nature he finds himself exercising a power, which he neither understands, nor is able but very partially to direct or control. The very breath, by which life is sustained, is drawn by a power exerted without the concurrence of his will, and by a mechanism, which he neither contrived nor is able to comprehend. It is by an appetite of nature, in which he has no choice, not by any contrivance or discretion of his own, that he is impelled to seek and to take the food, which gives him nourishment and support ; nor can he either direct, or even trace the wonderful process, by which the purpose is accomplished.

Thus might it be expected, that the manner in which the most common functions of animal life are performed, and the most common wants of men are supplied, should dispose them to search after the Author of nature, and prepare them for the acknowledgment of his being, and the reception of the first principles of religion. How far this alone might be expected actually to give them any correct notions of the being and government of God, and of the worship due to him, is another question. All that I am concerned at present to show is, that it invites and disposes to religious inquiry, prepares the mind for religious impression, and thus conducts one step toward accounting for the alleged universality of some kind of religion.

2. Connected with what has been now urged is another circumstance, which, by an equally powerful impulse, excites to the contemplation of some superior power, and leads to the belief that such a power ex-

ists, and is to be seen in the government of the world. If men are led to the supposition of a superior invisible power by those circumstances in the regular course of things, and the constant operation of established laws, which give them a sense of dependence on such power; they must be led to it not less forcibly, by all the apparent irregularities and exceptions to which the laws of the universe seem to be subject. If the laws themselves and their uniform operation excite attention, not less so will their occasional interruption.

Nor is it only on great occasions, and by important events, that their attention is thus awakened. It is in the occurrences of every day. Between human exertions and the end they are intended to accomplish, they perceive a degree of connexion, sufficient for a motive of action, yet neither certain, nor constant. Man may labor in vain; may toil, and watch, and contrive to no purpose. Even in those things, which are most properly the fruit of his own labor, the reward of his personal industry, — he has learned little, who is yet to learn, that it is far from being always “of him that willeth, or of him that runneth;” that the wisest counsels may be defeated, and faithful and well-directed labors fail of success, through the operation of causes entirely above his control or his comprehension; but which must be subject to some superior power. He has skilfully and faithfully cultivated the field, committed his seed to the ground at the proper season, and done all that human care and human labor can do to ensure a crop. But the elements are

unpropitious. The shower is withheld, the chills of winter are protracted, and encroach on the summer ; unseasonable frost cuts down the tender plant, tempests lay waste, or armies of insects devour the unripe crops, and the hopes of the season are destroyed. In all this uncertainty, liability to failure, and exposure to defeat in his best purposes, he feels his dependence, perceives the necessity of a coöperation above his knowledge and beyond his control to ensure success to his industry ; and whatever there may be of contingency in the whole, as respects himself, he can hardly fail of being led to the apprehension of the agency of an intelligent and designing power, acting on a plan, and accomplishing definite purposes.

Thus it is, that the natural wants of man, and the manner in which they are supplied, taking into view both the degree of order and certainty, and the measure of irregularity and uncertainty that prevail, suggest a superior invisible power, and lead to the first impressions of religion.

3. In the same manner also do his sufferings and dangers, in the next place, point him to a higher power, and compel him, as it were, to fly to it for safety, protection, and relief. He is feeble ; — in many cases, and under many circumstances, quite incompetent to the common purposes of self-defence and self-preservation. There are dangers, which he cannot elude, sufferings, which he knows not how to escape, accidents, which he has neither the sagacity to foresee, nor the ability to prevent, or ward off. His possessions are precarious, his pleasures transient, his

hopes subject to disappointment. The power of enjoyment is as fleeting and evanescent as that of possession. Yesterday he was healthful and vigorous, his prospects unclouded, his hopes fair and bright, and unapprehensive of change; to-day his frame is racked with pain; relentless disease has fastened on the principle of life; pale with anguish and dismay, he is insensible to the beauties of nature, or to the interests, or possessions, or friendships of the world. He is besides mortal, and cannot fail to look forward frequently with concern to a destiny certain, unavoidable, and so deeply interesting as that, which closes his present existence, and terminates his connexion with and interest in all that he sees. The inherent, instinctive love of life, the objects of interest and affection, which make life valuable and dear to him; the very imperfect degree, in which the purposes of life seem here accomplished; the consciousness of possessing faculties and affections, which are susceptible of higher improvement, than they here attain; the manner in which all his purposes, and hopes, and improvements are abruptly broken off in the midst by death, half finished, half attained, half accomplished; all this must inspire the wish, and that wish alone will be parent to some faint hope at least, that the life, which seems extinguished by death, may not be extinguished forever. And the same thought and the same hope, that arises in looking forward to the close of his own present being, will arise in an equal degree at least, when he thinks, as he has so often occasion to think, of that of others, especially of those in the near relations of life.

We yield with unwillingness to the painful thought, that objects so dear to us, so identified with all our interests, with all our affections, and with all our future hopes on earth, are separated from us forever. We wish to think that it is not forever; that they are not blotted out from the book of life; that there is a principle, an imperishable principle, that survives; that life and thought, and affection and action, are suspended only for a time, not extinguished. But where is the power that can give consistency to this hope? that can reanimate the slumbering clay, and awaken the vital spark, that death has extinguished? This power is not in himself, it is not in any of his fellow mortals. Neither was that of imparting life originally. It must then have been the gift of a superior power; and the strong desire of having it continued or renewed may lead to this obvious reflection, which might otherwise have been overlooked, and thus at once inspire the hope of a future life, and lead to the acknowledgment of that Being, who alone has power to grant it. And besides, the mind, thus once directed by its wishes and its hopes to a higher power, will be prepared to attend to all those notices of the being, perfections, and providence of God, which appear in the objects and operations of nature. It is also thus inclined to listen to the evidence which is presented, and ready to allow it its just weight.

Thus does this circumstance in his condition, like the others, that have before been mentioned, not actually impart any principles or knowledge of religion,

but prepare the mind for their reception, when presented with their proper evidence; and predispose it to the acknowledgment of the being and government of God, and the worship due to him. Without such predisposition, produced by the several circumstances in the human condition, that have been mentioned, it may be doubted, whether all the displays of power and wisdom and goodness in the creation, would not have been overlooked, and have failed of producing a general conviction of the existence, and acknowledgment of the perfections and government of God. But by their separate and united influence the attention of mankind has been excited, a sense of dependence has been awakened, the strongest passions of the heart have contributed an influence, hope, fear, and the love of existence, — especially have the great and eternal interests, which every heart must feel, and which religion alone can ensure, contributed to give the attention of men a right direction.

Yet with all the attention thus excited and predisposition thus produced, how little of true religion is it, that unassisted nature has ever received! and that little how imperfect! how mixed with error, absurdity, or uncertainty! Seldom has it been a distinct apprehension and definite belief of one original cause and intelligent author of nature. Usually it has been only a general conviction of a superior power in the creation and government of the world, and if any definite notions, extremely false and absurd ones, as to his unity and perfections, and as to the worship due to him from reasonable beings.

To this representation we have a strong attestation in the actual state of religion in all ages in the heathen world. The Jews were the only nation of antiquity, that were not polytheists. Nor has anything like a rational system of natural religion ever been found in any age, in a nation not enlightened by divine revelation.

Nor is this all. Even of the little they have, that is true and just in religion, it may well be doubted, whether all is the result of the unaided exertions of human reason. For where is the people or the individual, that has been left to the sole guidance of nature and unassisted reason? Go to the deepest recesses of pagan darkness,—is there an individual that has had nothing imparted to him from others,—nothing that he has received by education? Have no notions or impressions been transmitted down from the parent to the children? Nothing imbibed from early instruction, received implicitly from parental authority, at an early period, before the faculties are matured? Now, whatever is thus communicated by the immediate parent, was probably received by him in the same manner from his ancestor, and by him from a preceding generation. It has been transmitted in this manner from immemorial time. Some of it may have been, and not improbably was, in reality, handed down from an original revelation made in the early ages of the world. In a long succession of ages, such a revelation, passing through rude and barbarous periods, may have lost many of its primitive features, may have been so altered, adulterated, and distorted,

as to bear little resemblance at last, to what it was at first ; and serve only to transmit some general notions, and perpetuate some general impression. This supposed revelation made to the common progenitors of the human race, transmitted by oral tradition, may have passed, with different degrees of corruption, and with various changes, to nations and tribes of men, that have been for ages separated from any communication with the enlightened parts of the world, and which, for the want of permanent records, may have entirely lost the knowledge of its origin. Besides this, it is impossible to say how much the heathen world may have owed the purest and best parts of their religion to their intercourse with those nations, to whom were committed the Jewish and Christian revelation. That some benefit may have been derived from this intercourse, we are authorized to conclude, when it is seen, that the most defective systems, and grosser forms of faith, worship, and manners have usually been found in remotest regions, and among people the farthest and the longest separated from those portions of mankind, on whom the light of revelation has shone.

An original revelation then, delivered down by oral tradition, either from the first progenitors of our race, or from the venerable patriarch by whose descendants the world was repopled after the deluge, we may be allowed to mention as another of the methods, by which God has made himself known to all men, and to be assigned as another of the causes of the alleged universality of religion.

That such a revelation was in fact made to the first parents of our race, we have the testimony of Scripture; and we cannot but remark how well it corresponds with the information we receive from every other source, and how much it will aid us in accounting in a satisfactory manner for the actual state of things. But whatever may be the fact, as to an early revelation thus handed down, neither the variety of the systems, which have prevailed where revelation was not enjoyed, nor yet the absurdity of some of them, will impair the force of the inference we deduce from the universal prevalence of religion in some form.

CHAPTER IV.

SOURCES OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH
CONTINUED.

IN the last chapter has been shown the foundation, which religion has in the nature of man, and the sources of its knowledge, as they are disclosed in his make, in his faculties, and in several circumstances in the human condition, which lead the mind to the knowledge, and impel it, as it were, to the acknowledgment of an intelligent author of nature, and moral governor of the world.

There is another source of religious knowledge, not to be overlooked, not less obvious and striking than these. It is that, which is found in the constant indications, which God is giving of himself to every rational being in the ordinances of nature, and the conduct of providence.

“He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, giving us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons.”

These are adduced as instances familiar and obvious, but neither more certain nor more striking, than innumerable other manifestations of the Deity.

No part of the book of nature is barren of religious instruction, and its pages are alike open to the illiterate peasant and the philosophic sage, to the roving,

houseless savage and the refined citizen. The knowledge it imparts is accessible alike to the wandering Scythian, who sees nature in her rudest forms in his forests and mountains, and the disciple of the schools, who beholds her adorned with all the arts of cultivated taste.

To each of these alike, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy work.” Each of them is alike invited in the calmness and serenity of evening, and in the brightness and cheerfulness of returning day, to meditate on the beauty, the regular and majestic movements, the distance, and order, and splendor, which are presented to the admiring view; and in all their magnificence, and lustre, and usefulness, to trace the footsteps of a power, and wisdom, and beneficence, which are above and beyond them all. They may thus catch a glimpse of that glorious Being, “who covereth himself with light, as with a garment; who sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain; who hath given the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night;” and is thus daily saying to every human being, what he once said by a prophet of old, — “Lift up your eyes on high and behold, who hath created these things, that bringeth out their hosts by number, that calleth them by their names, and not one faileth?”

He may then descend to the world below. But their genial influence and kind effects follow him here. The successive seasons return, and with them the

expected alternation of cold and heat, summer and winter, seed time and harvest. The curtains of darkness are drawn around him. All nature is hushed in silence, and invites to rest and repose ; but the morning light returns without fail with the revolving hour, and opens to him again the pleasant prospects, and delightful scenes of life and activity, of business and pleasure. The world around him teems with life, and growth, and vigor. The hills are covered with flocks, the forests wave in majestic solitude, the plains bend with the ripening grain ; and cities and villages, crowded with population, are filled with plenty ; and the myriads of sentient and intellectual beings, that are brought forth, find abundant provision for all their necessities, and a supply adapted to their natures and wants. And when he sees, as a little reflection must enable him to see, how all this beauty, life, activity, and happiness depends on the established order of things, and could continue no longer, than the orderly course of nature should proceed on without interruption, he can hardly fail of looking beyond what is visible and instrumental, to the invisible author, contriver, supporter of the whole ; to “ Him, who appointed the ordinances of heaven, — who causeth the dayspring to know his place ; — who covereth the heavens with clouds, and prepareth rain for the earth, who sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills ; who watereth the hills from his chambers ; who causeth the grass to grow for cattle, and herb for the service of man ; who bringeth food out of the earth ; who openeth his hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.”

These, which have been mentioned, are external and obvious ; such as meet the eye, and are level with the observation of all. They are what the meanest capacity may perceive, and what the rudest and most uncultivated mind can hardly have overlooked. Others are less obvious ; require thought and reflection, and occur only to minds of a certain degree of cultivation. But to such as are capable of perceiving and estimating their importance, they come with great force, present new and most interesting views, and bring strong conviction.

Thus, there is a chain of being gradually ascending from inert matter, through numberless degrees and modes of being, with various powers of perception and action, in the several forms of vegetable, animal, and intellectual life ; all apparently constituting one complete system, the several parts linked together by essential ties, no part of which is redundant or useless, each related to all the others, and essential to some. In this vast and complicated system, rising, expanding, embracing all that is seen, and far more than man can comprehend, the curious and inquisitive observer seeks, but seeks in vain, for some part within itself, some governing principle, some master spring, which moves, directs, and animates the whole. He finds himself obliged to go beyond the machinery, in search of the mind that contrived, and the hand that guides it all. So vast is the scheme, and of such extent, that the mind is lost in its contemplation, and wearied in the attempt to grasp it. It is composed of materials so heterogeneous, so dis-

cordant, and combined in such infinite variety, that we are bewildered in endless mazes. Its combinations and relations of parts to one another, and each to the whole, are multiplied beyond the power of numbers to express, or the capacity of a finite mind to explain or to understand. Yet in all the war of hostile elements and discordant passions, such is the exact adjustment of the whole, such the reciprocal checks and balances, that, with the principles of attraction and repulsion, love and hatred, union and separation, acting and reacting, with unceasing industry in every direction, there is yet to be seen the clearest indication of one single design, one steady purpose, of this complicated mass constituting one beautiful whole, to which every part, however refractory, is made to contribute its share. And as the design is single, the purpose one, the system itself large, complicated, and composed, as it is, of parts that cannot be numbered, a whole, it leads by a most natural process to the suggestion of a single intelligence, distinct from itself, as the author, contriver, and director of the whole.

Again ; there are reflections still more remote from common notice and observation, that give a very forcible impulse to the mind, when they once occur, either to suggest, or to confirm the faith of a Supreme intelligence, and thus to lay the foundation of religion. In the earliest and rudest state of the human mind its researches are hardly extended beyond sensible objects ; but at a more advanced period of intellectual cultivation, it begins to look within, to turn its thoughts

inward upon itself, and examine its own make and constitution, its faculties, its affections, and the extent and variety of impression, and action, and improvement, of which it is susceptible.

The whole machinery of the body, which he inhabits, is a curious and wonderful subject for examination. The structure and uses of the several parts, their exact mechanism, their exquisite organization, their mutual adaptation, their suitableness to the purposes for which they are formed. These views alone are enough to extort from him the exclamation, — “wonderfully made, and curiously wrought.” He looks further, and discovers greater wonders. Within the external frame, and concealed from view by its covering, is a complicated system of vessels, by the constant operation of which the nourishment, growth, and support of the whole is carried on; yet by a process in which he not only has no choice and no voluntary agency, but which he can neither understand nor trace.

The breath, which supplies a constant recruit of the vital principle to the whole system, performs its office by a process, over which we have very little control, and in which man has no voluntary agency. The blood, which rolls in our veins, and carries nourishment, and imparts strength to every part, is propelled by a power independent of our will, and maintains a perpetual motion without our consent or our consciousness. These are but a specimen of almost innumerable spontaneous operations perpetually going on, which, without any will or agency of our

own, contribute to our growth, preservation, comfort, and continuance in being. These operations are not even the object of thought to a large proportion of mankind. They do not even carry their contemplations far enough to be struck with the wonders they present; they occur only to those, who have arrived to some degree of advancement in science, and who are habituated to reflection and observation.

Other objects of observation, and powers and operations of nature, indicative of a supreme intelligence and governor of the universe, are still more remote from common view, and less within the scope of the general notice of mankind. I mean those, which are not presented to any of our senses, which offer themselves only to our intellectual or moral perception. What a new scene of creating, disposing, directing, and overruling power meets our admiring thought, in the sensitive, intellectual, and moral scheme! The powers of perception and activity, and the capacity for enjoyment, with which the innumerable tribes and endless variety of creatures are endued! In the possession of which, they have no choice, and in their exercise and use have prescribed limits and laws! The inferior orders of creatures led to the objects suited to them, and guided in the choice of means "necessary to their preservation and increase, and to answer the purposes for which they were designed," so as to fill their exact place in the creation, and conform to the demands of their relation to other creatures, by an unerring instinct. Each individual of every species occupying

a station, from which it could not be spared without impairing the beauty and perfection of the whole, "and answering its destined ends, without knowing what those ends are, and without any desire of attaining them."

Man at the head of this part of creation, is not indeed guided in all his actions, and directed in all his pursuits, by a blind instinct. He is distinguished by a superior faculty. Reason in him supplies, and more than supplies the place of those instincts, which serve to guide inferior creatures. This faculty, understood in its largest extent for the whole intellectual nature of man, as it is that which makes him capable of religion, a proper subject of a divine government, and capable of perceiving those truths, which are its foundation; is also in itself, and furnishes in its operations, one of the most decisive proofs of the being and agency of the Author of Nature. It is indeed such a proof only to those, who have learned to turn their thoughts in upon themselves, to examine their faculties and observe their operation. But to such, the whole intellectual apparatus, together with its moral relations and tendencies, present new views, open to new discoveries, and furnish still stronger proofs, than the lower faculties, of the Supreme and all perfect intelligence.

The phenomena of thought, memory, and imagination present wonders, inexplicable and constantly increasing, to him who makes them the subject of his contemplation and inquiry. The more he reflects upon them the more is he astonished at the

powers he finds within him, and the less is he able to conceive where they reside, how he came to possess them, and how he exerts them. He is confounded when he attempts to follow the rapidity of thought, not only in its instantaneous passage from object to object through the immensity of space and time, bringing together at a single glance the most distant, the most unlike, passing in an instant from the present to the remotest age, and from the contemplation of a world or a system, to that of the minutest particle that is the object of sense; but in the constant and ordinary motions of the body, which obey the direction of the mind, especially in the expression of thought by speech, and the readiness and quickness with which the organs of the body yield obedience to the dictates of the mind. But if the power he has to exert and direct the mind is incomprehensible, still more so is that which he has not. How is it that faculties so useful and important to him, a part of himself, are but partially under his direction, and subject to his control? Sometimes they are incapable of being called into action, and sometimes are fastened on objects from which they refuse to be disengaged, and no effort is sufficient to subject the thought, the memory, and the imagination to the control of the will.

Where and what is the link that connects the mind with the body! Who can penetrate, and detect the secret springs of human action, and say how the several organs of the body obey the will! Who can explain how the will itself is put in motion, how it is influenced by motives, and what is the precise

degree of power he has to create, suspend, increase, or diminish that influence ; or to give it a new direction !

The passions and appetites make an important part of our nature, and are intimately connected with our character, and happiness, and the whole course of human actions. Without them the higher faculties would be in a manner useless, for want of stimulus to excite them to activity. On their exact adjustment to the rest of our constitution, our condition, and relations, depend all that is excellent in character, and all that is desirable in being. But how this adjustment is made, the affections, appetites, and passions, proportioned to their end and directed to their object, who can comprehend ! Who, that has reflected on their wonderful economy, has not perceived also how far both the contrivance and the execution are above the comprehension and the power of him, in whom they reside, and lead by an irresistible impulse to seek satisfaction in the supposition of a superior intelligence and power ! To similar results we are led by the contemplation of man, as an improvable being ; the faculties and affections gradually unfolding, and growing up to their perfection, in the individual, and in their progress and development perfecting its intellectual, social, and moral nature.

But our observations stop not there. The improvements of one generation serve as a basis on which to build those of the succeeding. Hence the progress of society, the advancement of science and

arts, the gradual progress toward higher perfection in the social condition, and in all those improvements, which distinguish each successive age of the world from those that preceded.

Such are some of the views constantly presented to the mind, some of them open only to minds cultivated with knowledge, and habituated to reflection, but many of them such as none can have been strangers to, which lead man to the knowledge of his Maker.

And lest these common notices should fail to excite attention and produce conviction ; lest in an unvarying order and regular course of nature, the hand that directs it should be undiscerned, and the goodness which prompted it should be unperceived and unacknowledged ; apparent or real interruptions of this order are sometimes permitted. He is roused by the tempest, who moved on thoughtless and unconcerned with the safe and gentle breeze. The voice of God is heard and confessed in the thunder, though in language less awful and impressive, but not less clear and distinct, he daily speaks unheard in the whispering breeze, the murmuring of the brook, and the melody of the grove. Year after year shall the seasons return in their order with their respective blessings, and the earth pour forth the abundance of her productions, while the inhabitants, in ease and prosperity, have totally forgotten the hand that feeds and the arm that supports them, nor lift one pious thought to Him “who first laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be re-

moved ;” and ceaseth not his care over all its concerns. But let this peaceful order be disturbed, and with their terrors will be awakened their attention to that Almighty power, which can create or destroy, can preserve or overturn the order he has established. In the earthquake and the volcano, they will confess His hand, “who looketh on the earth and it trembleth, who toucheth the mountains and they smoke.” In the desolating famine they look up to Him, whom they forgot while he fed them with abundance. In the wasting pestilence they are reminded of their dependence on a higher power for health and security. “He hideth his face, and they are troubled,” and lift up their souls to him. He brings trouble and distress upon nations, turns the counsels of princes to madness, the foundations of society are broken up, the earth is filled with violence. Then in the depth of their sufferings and their fear of impending evils, which they know not how to escape, men fly for refuge to an unseen power, and confess that providence in the infliction of punishment, which they had denied, or overlooked in the bestowment of mercies. “I will go, and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face.” “In their affliction they will seek me early.”

CHAPTER V.

MEN LEFT TO THE LIGHT OF NATURE NEGLECTED
TO SEEK THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

THIS assertion is supported by the Apostle. In the account given by Paul of the heathen world, we find a lively but mournful picture of their moral and religious practice ; “ they became vain in their imaginations, had their foolish hearts darkened, changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like to corruptible man ; and worshipped and served the creature more than the creator.” How painful even to look at the picture thus drawn of the state of the world in those regions where, by the absence of revelation, false religion has prevailed. And yet have we any reason to doubt its correctness ? How sad is it to witness the strange perverseness with which men have neglected the means God has given them for coming to the knowledge of himself and their duty, and turned away from the light that was shining upon them. How strangely have they, in the wisdom of God in the creation, overlooked the creator ; paid divine homage to the objects of nature instead of rendering it to the Author and Lord of nature ; exalted their human benefactors into the place of Him who made them to be benefactors to the world ; and what is still more remarkable, transferred to the images

of terrestrial or celestial objects that homage, which is not due even to the objects themselves which they represent!

But if such has been the character of the heathen world, and such the ignorance and corruption of manners, shall we be able to perceive its consistency with all that has before been said of circumstances in human nature and the human condition, and the constitution of things in the midst of which we are placed? If such has been the acknowledged result, is it credible that the circumstances were such, as has been represented? On the other hand, if such were the circumstances, can the result be accounted for or rendered credible?

To us, to whom the primary truths of religion and its essential principles were communicated among the first instructions of childhood, and were imbibed among our earliest impressions, they seem so obvious and so perfectly rational, that we can hardly conceive of their being mistaken or overlooked by beings, having the same faculties and feelings as ourselves. So instantly and so entirely do they obtain the assent of the understanding, that we are not even conscious of the source from which we originally drew them. By early and reiterated impression they have become so incorporated with all our natural notions, and are in themselves so congenial to our feelings, that we do not easily realize, that they were not originally the result of our own reasoning and reflection.

But then, is there any people, uninstructed by

divine revelation, to whom reasoning and reflection have taught these truths?

I am not unaware of the extreme difficulty of determining with any considerable precision, in any given case, how far nature and reason have actually gone, or what aid, direct or indirect, may have been derived from revelation.

For, look at any portion of the pagan world, at any period of its history. Are we sure, that all we see is the pure uncorrupted and unassisted result of the workings of human reason? Together with much that is false and absurd you will doubtless find some of the sound and correct parts of true religion. But is it certain that even these, few, imperfect, and intermixed with errors, as they may be, are the mere deductions of reason, and drawn from no higher source? Is it certain that they have not come to them, either immediately or remotely from revelation, and become so incorporated into their system, as to be no longer distinguishable from those parts, which were derived from another source?

It has been said, that the nearer, in point of time and place, that men have lived to the great depositaries of divine revelation, and the more free intercourse they have had with those, to whom were committed the oracles of God, the more have they had that is sound and conformable to enlightened reason in their religious faith and principles; and on the other hand, that their conceptions of God, and all their notions of religion have been irrational and absurd, their worship impure, and their principles cor-

rupt, in proportion as they have been cut off from intercourse with those, who have been enlightened by revelation.

Now, if it be so, and that it is, I believe will be confirmed by the most authentic accounts we have of the forms of religion that have prevailed in heathen lands, will it not furnish a strong presumption, if it be not a conclusive argument, that much of what is true in the religion of the heathen, was borrowed from revelation by their intercourse with those, who enjoyed the light of revelation; and though conformable to reason, not attributable to it as the source from which it was directly drawn.

Without affecting at all the question at issue, it may be conceded, that individual philosophers have occasionally appeared, who have perceived the absurdity of the popular faith, have rejected it, and have acknowledged only one God over all, to whom has been directed their supreme homage; and have united also with this correct faith some just notions of the nature and obligations of virtue, and of the moral government of God, manifested in the distributions of the present and a future life. For with what propriety can the opinions and doctrines of a few individual philosophers be alleged, as the natural notions of mankind; even upon the supposition that we were sure, they were reasoned out solely by the light of nature? For they are solitary cases. Not only have they not been thus reasoned out by others generally; but few have been ready to receive them upon their authority, when proposed to them as the

discoveries of philosophy. Idolatry and Polytheism were still the popular doctrine. Not only the discovery but the reception of a purer doctrine, when proposed merely as a deduction of reason, and without the authority of a divine revelation, was a rare event.

Did the Greeks in the time of Socrates and Plato, or the Romans in the time of Cicero, direct their religious worship to the one true God alone, a worship worthy of the infinite and holy one, and conformable to their lofty speculations upon his nature and character? Let the pictures, drawn by their own poets, philosophers, and historians inform us, what was the nature of their religion, what the objects of their worship, and what the morals that found a support in their religion, and in the example of the beings, to whom they paid divine honors!

The praise of genius, of learning, of arts, of refinement, we do not deny them. These distinctions, in an eminent degree, were unquestionably theirs. Nor was that of many sublime and splendid virtues any more to be called in doubt; yet how little was this in accordance with what we know from the most unquestionable testimony was the character of the popular religion, and the prevalent morality, both as to principle and practice! Their religion was imbued with no portion of the light or the spirit of their philosophy. Not even that of the philosophers themselves. Temples erected to idols were crowded with worshippers, and their altars covered with victims; but the God of heaven, the Creator and Lord

of the Universe, where in any land, not blest with the light of revelation, was there a temple assigned him, or a form of worship, or votaries to acknowledge his being and authority, and to call upon his name? Not even the philosophers themselves, whatever were their speculations, rendered any homage to Him. And the populace, profoundly ignorant and superstitious, and who receive all upon trust, were strongly attached by education and custom to the national worship; and were ready to engage with equal sincerity and zeal, whether to vindicate, at the instigation of Demetrius, the worship of the great goddess Diana, and the image which fell down from Jupiter; or, to offer sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, when they had performed a miraculous cure, in a belief, that "the Gods were come down to them in the likeness of men." Thus was it literally true, that the world, the great mass of men, knew not God. A few, a very few, with better means at their command, and a better use of their means, attained to juster conceptions on the subject. But this was all. It turned to no practical use. For when they "knew God, they did not worship him as God."

If we look back to an earlier period, the picture presented will be neither more flattering nor more encouraging.

That the rude inhabitants of Canaan, sunk in gross barbarism, should be gross also in their conceptions and corrupt in their practice, on the subject of religion, we are not to be surprised. We are not to wonder that people, thoroughly brutish and savage,

should have Gods in their own likeness, — should bow down before the sluggish and stupid Dagon, and pass their children through the fire, to the fierce and cruel Moloch. But, the Egyptians, the learned and refined Egyptians, what shall we say in excuse for them? Their country the seat of all the learning of the age! The school of Philosophers, Statesmen, and Legislators, whence they went forth in every direction to diffuse their knowledge through all other lands. With their learning their religion also found its way into every other quarter of the world. But how unlike what might have been expected from the depth of their learning, and the wisdom of their philosophy! Instead of the sublime truths, and reasonable services of a pure religion; we find them abandoned to superstitions of the grossest character, such as will hardly find a parallel for absurdity in the darkest ages, or among the most uncultivated people. So utterly absurd was the choice of the objects of their worship, and so strangely multiplied, that we find it not easy to lend our faith to the most authentic history on the subject, that has come down to us.

Less gross and absurd somewhat, but scarcely more reasonable, was the worship of the ancient Assyrians and Chaldeans. It was directed indeed to nobler objects; but still not to Him, who alone is worthy of the homage of all created beings. Their religion bore no proportion to their cultivation and refinement in all other respects.

To ascertain what reason without revelation has actually done on the subject of religion, no argument

is more obvious, or striking, or convincing, than that, which is drawn from a comparison of the Jews with other nations contemporary with them in this respect.

None will pretend, that, with respect to human knowledge of any kind, that nation had any superiority over their neighbors ; or that they enjoyed, except from the light of revelation, any better means than they, for coming to the knowledge of God. Yet what a difference was there, between the religious knowledge of this people, and that of surrounding nations, through every period of their history ! That they should excel in the purity of their faith and their worship the half civilized tribes of Canaan, is no ground for surprise. But how came they by a more rational religion, than the learned and polished Egyptians, or the refined and inquisitive Chaldeans ? We see Moses, placing over his brethren, the children of Israel, whom he had delivered from the bondage of Egypt, Institutions of Law, Religion, and Morals, founded on the basis of the true Theology ; while the Egyptians, among whom he had spent his early days, and received his education, though far more enlightened in other respects, than his nation, just emancipated from a rigorous slavery, can be supposed, were yet the most gross and senseless idolaters on the face of the earth.

We see again this people of Israel, untaught in human learning, and despised for it by their more enlightened neighbors, directing their worship exclusively to the one true God ; while the Chaldeans, distin-

guished then above every other people for their learning, and the depth of their researches, and especially for some of those branches of human knowledge, which seem to have the closest affinity with the true Theology, were yet idolaters. They were celebrated for their knowledge of Astronomy, and no science seems better adapted than that, to raise the soul to just and sublime conceptions of the Author of nature. The Jews, as far as we know, were quite ignorant and untaught on this subject ; yet we know, that the latter were strict worshippers of the One Author and Lord of the Universe, while the former were alternately paying their adoration to the Hosts of Heaven, and bowing down to the golden image, which Nebuchadnezzar their king had set up.

Again, at a subsequent period, while Rome, in the zenith of her glory for arts, and arms, and learning, and refinement, was filled with Temples dedicated to an army of gods, celestial, terrestrial, and infernal, — and some of them, whose detestable characters could only be equalled by the impurity and the cruelty of the rites of their worship ; — we see, in a small and rude corner of the world, undistinguished for either human learning or refinement, a few plain, unlettered men, who had enjoyed no extraordinary advantages of education, teaching a system of religion, which, for its reasonableness, its sublimity, and its purity, has never been equalled, nor will ever cease to be the admiration of the most enlightened of mankind. Whence had these men, and whence had their teacher, this knowledge ?

The moral influence of the pagan religions, — what was it? Preferable, doubtless, to the absence of all religion. In its worst form less hostile probably to virtue than atheism; yet in its best form how far inferior to that of true religion!

Every system of pagan worship had some connexion with the government, laws, and institutions of society, and each was useful, by laying men under some wholesome restraints, and subjecting them to some salutary fears. These were their beneficial effects. At the same time, the looseness of principle and licentiousness and ferocity of character attributed to some of the heathen gods, — and the human passions and affections, and the human frailties, to which, in the popular faith, all were supposed to be subject, — must have the effect to lower the standard of morality, and to loosen the sense of its obligation. It must even furnish to the most profligate an apology, and an easy justification for their worst actions. When we consider the character of their gods, as represented by their best poets, the argument put into the mouth of one of his characters by a Greek dramatist is perfectly natural. “It is what the gods themselves have done,” said he, “and shall *I* affect to be more perfect than they?”

Savage nations, it is said, treat their benevolent deities with neglect, and offer them no worship; because they are naturally inclined to do them good, and there is therefore no necessity for conciliating their kind offices. But they are assiduous in their attention to the malignant spirits, and careful never

to fail in their devotion to them, in order to propitiate them, and prevent them from doing them harm.

Now what must be the natural effect of this upon their characters? The same spirit, which they indulge toward their gods, will mark their conduct toward men. They will be influenced less by the nobler, than by the meaner motives, less by gratitude and love, than by fear. And they will be more inclined to imitate the cruel gods, whose power they dread, and whom for that reason they chiefly worship, than the gentle and beneficent beings, whose worship they think they can neglect with impunity.

No doctrine of religion is so direct and powerful in its practical influence, as that of a future life, with all its hopes and its fears. But this doctrine is intimately connected with the whole system of religious faith. It will be modified by the characters attributed to the objects of worship, and by the interest they are supposed to take in the actions and the interests of men, and the kind of government, which they exercise over them. According to the dispositions and character attributed to their gods, men will seek to please them, and thus to obtain their favor and the joys of heaven, by purity and holiness, or by irregular excesses; by the gentle and peaceful virtues, or by arduous enterprises and martial exploits; by abstinence from sin, or by voluntary penance, bodily afflictions, ritual observances, or costly sacrifices. How imperfect then, and how uncertain must be the influence of this doctrine, where it is not connected with those just views of the divine character and govern-

ment, and of the final destiny of man, which are clearly presented only in the Holy Scriptures.

No form of this doctrine perhaps is such, and no other doctrines with which it is connected, as wholly to prevent its having any good moral influence ; but, with an absurd or a corrupt system of faith, it may lead also to acts, some of which only excite our pity by their simplicity ; while others, by their revolting nature, call for a stronger sentiment.

The poor Indian is led, by his low conceptions and crude notions of a future life, to deposite by the side of his departed friend the food that is to sustain him in his long journey to the world of spirits ; and the bow and arrow, for which he may there have occasion.

Similar notions of a future state in some parts of Africa and the East have laid the foundation of customs, which awaken a different feeling. Not only is a supply of meat and drink furnished for his accommodation in his passage to the world of spirits ; but his slaves and his wives must also be buried with him, to accompany and to serve him in those dark abodes.

In Japan, we are told, that, excited by glowing pictures of the regions of the blest beyond the grave, and misled by false notions, taught by false religion, as to the conditions and qualifications for admission to them, the pious devotee, tired of the dull scenes of the present life, and impatient of its labors and its evils, seeks rashly by an act of violence an asylum in the grave, that he may the sooner arrive at the envied abodes.

It is only when this doctrine is connected, as it is in the Christian faith, with just views of the character and the government of God, that its whole best influence, and without alloy, can be felt.

CHAPTER VI.

BELIEF IN THE BEING OF GOD ESSENTIAL TO RELIGION. PROOFS ON WHICH IT RESTS.

FAITH in the being of God is the point at which we commence, and from which we proceed in our inquiries. Without this article of faith, there can be no room for any other; and consequently no foundation for piety, and no room for any act of worship. But although this simple truth alone is a valid foundation for religion, it does not determine its character, nor the form it shall take. These will depend upon the attributes with which, in our conceptions, he is invested. And accordingly our religion will become a reasonable and delightful service, a servile task, or an absurd transaction; according to the character in which the object of our worship is presented to our imagination.

As the truth that there is a God, meaning by this an intelligent author of all things, is thus the foundation of all religion, the proofs, upon which the faith of it rests, should be faithfully presented to the mind in all their clearness and force.

I have endeavored to prepare the way for this proof by several considerations. This preparatory course was the more necessary, because, as was then stated, even this first principle of all religion has sel-

dom been the faith of those, who have not enjoyed the light of revelation. So that were we to regard the opinions that have usually prevailed in the heathen world as expressing the true doctrines of natural religion, and showing what reason alone was capable of teaching on the subject of religion, we must not include in them even the being of God. We shall be obliged to come to the conclusion, that Polytheism, and not the worship of one God, is the religion of nature.

But such a conclusion, we may perhaps be led to think, would not be correct. We may be satisfied, that it is not just to infer what reason is capable of doing from what she has actually done, and to assert that she can do no more. Reason may be neglected or perverted. Men may fail to use their faculties, however richly endowed with them, or may make a wrong use of them, and so fail of the attainments of which God has made them capable. In other respects, as well as in regard to their religion, this is confessedly the case. The errors into which they have fallen are chargeable, in many cases, not to the defect of reason, but to its neglect or perversion. Although therefore it were conceded, that the first great truths of religion, the being, the unity, and the government of God had never been discovered by the light of nature alone; yet, if when proposed, they are seen by every cultivated mind, not under the dominion of some opposing interest, prejudice, or passion, to be most reasonable and capable of satisfactory proof; it will be allowed that there is a just

and important sense, in which they may be denominated, doctrines of natural religion. And this is the question to which we have now come ; at least so far as respects the first and primary truth, the being of God, an intelligent first cause of all things.

He that cometh to God, must believe that he is. This article of faith, implied in the very first act of religion, is usually considered as having its foundation in two different, and directly opposite modes of reasoning, the one from cause to effect, the other from effect to cause. In the first of these, the argument consists in discovering any truth in question in its known or supposed cause. Thus knowing in any case the nature of a power employed, we infer what effect will be produced ; knowing the character and disposition of a being, and the circumstances, in which it is placed, we can foresee how it will act. We can accordingly infer the wisdom and the justice of any particular act of Providence from the known or assumed wisdom and rectitude of the divine character. By the other mode of reasoning, on the other hand, we infer the existence of the cause and its nature from the known effect. Thus we learn the properties of bodies from the effects which they produce, and the character and dispositions of living beings from the actions which they perform ; and applying this argument to the subject in question, we arrive at the knowledge of the being of God from the existence of the universe ; we learn his wisdom from the manifold marks of intelligence and design that appear ; and are assured of his benevolence by

provision of happiness for creatures he has made capable of enjoyment.

From this mere statement of the argument it will probably seem to some, that the former mode of reasoning, namely, from cause to effect, is inapplicable to the subject; that it is so at least in the form in which it has now been presented. Because, in the very statement of the argument is implied the apparent contradiction, that the first cause is an effect of a prior cause.

There is another form, thought not to be liable to the same objection, upon which some writers have placed great reliance. Thus the being of God is inferred by them from the necessary existence of infinite duration and infinite space. These, it is said, are qualities or attributes necessarily existing, because we cannot even conceive of their non-existence. They are obviously independent of the material and of the spiritual Universe; for they would still exist, were the whole material universe, and also the spiritual world annihilated; and they would have existed, had they never been created. We can by no effort of the mind imagine them not to be. Yet duration and space, it is said, being only attributes, like every other attribute or quality, imply the existence of a substance or being, to which they belong, a being like space unbounded, and like duration eternal. For as every attribute, or quality, implies a substance to which it belongs; so an attribute, which cannot even be conceived not to exist, implies a substance

to which it belongs, of which the non-existence is impossible and inconceivable.

But imposing and logical as this argument seems, and conclusive as it is thought to be by some who make use of it, I should be sorry to have it regarded as one of the principal grounds of faith in this great doctrine, or one upon which any considerable stress is laid. For the whole argument is of a very questionable character. Whether it has any real value, and is of any weight, depends upon the correctness of the position assumed respecting duration and space, namely, that they are properly attributes. For if they are not, the conclusion fails. For although all finite beings, as well as the infinite one, exist in time and space, can these terms be applied with propriety as the attributes of any being? Would they not be the same were there no being in existence? Even were we to suppose the non-existence of the infinite being himself, would space be annihilated and duration cease? Space will certainly remain, when the body that occupies it is taken away. It ceases to have the same relation to that body, but it is still there. So also will time flow on, though the clock that marks its progress stop; and even though the sun and the heavenly bodies, by whose revolutions it is measured, and divided into portions, were to cease their motions, or be blotted from existence.

Nor can you readily conceive them to be more closely connected with mind, than with body, or more dependent upon it for their existence; or that they can with more propriety be reckoned among the

properties, or attributes of the one, than of the other. Though there were no mind to pervade the regions of space, or to notice the lapse of time, can you even conceive that it should alter the extent of the one, or prevent the unceasing and the everlasting flow of the other?

Let us then be careful how we resort to an argument of so doubtful a nature for proof, where other proofs are to be had of irresistible force.

There is another form of abstract reasoning, an argument grounded on the nature of infinity, and of absolute perfection, of which its advocates affirm we have a clear and distinct idea, and which, it is argued, must contain in itself an adequate reason of necessary existence. Of this argument I shall not attempt a statement. I shall think it enough merely to have alluded to it; not expecting to be able to make that intelligible to the minds of others, which presents no distinct meaning to my own.

I should be unwilling to be the occasion of weakening the faith of those who derive any satisfaction from a manner of reasoning which gives none to my own mind, at the same time that I should be sorry that a principal stress were laid upon the force of an argument which seems to my judgment to be of a character so little to be relied upon.

There is still another method in use of expressing the ground of faith in the Being of God, that of an intuitive perception, neither imparted nor strengthened by any kind of reasoning on the subject. It is innate, intuitive.

This, however, can with no propriety be denominated either reasoning from cause to effect, or from effect to cause, as it disclaims all reasoning on the subject. According to those who use this form of speaking, the belief in God is not a deduction from any reasoning, but an immediate perception.

Placing no dependence then on the method of abstract reasoning of which we have now been speaking, in any form in which it has been employed by those, who think it satisfactory and conclusive; and regarding it as at least of doubtful applicability to the subject, let us proceed to the consideration of some of those arguments which are drawn from the existence, and the various phenomena of the material universe. The process here is simple, short, direct, and very intelligible. It is that which we have daily occasion to employ in the common concerns of life, and which we do employ with entire satisfaction, without the demand of any extraordinary exertion of the reasoning faculty. It requires but the single postulatam as its foundation, that every effect must have an adequate cause. The universe, and every being and every object in it, is an effect, the self-existent Being only excepted, and must have had a cause equal to its production.

This we say, upon the same grounds, and for the same reason that we say, that a building implies a builder, that motion implies a mover.

When any work of art is presented to the eye, the idea of the artist, by which it was produced is immediately suggested. It is inseparable from it, and you

have no more doubt of the reality of the one than of the other, though one of them is before your eyes, and the other you have never seen nor heard of. Thus you see a painting, and you know there must be a painter ; a statue, and you have no doubt, without any further reasoning on the subject, that it was the work of a statuary.

A complicated machine, composed of many parts nicely adapted to each other, and all together fitted to some important use, you certainly know must have been the work of ingenuity, and skill, and design, not of ignorance, or of chance. You know that there must have been employed in its formation a power and an intelligence answerable to the production ; and you would think him insane or disposed to unseasonable trifling, who should affect to have any doubt on the subject. And this is the way in which all men, in common cases, reason, and judge, and act. But if such a piece of mechanism, for example, as a watch or an organ, or even a plough or a penknife, contain such certain indications of intelligence and design in its structure, and its adaptation to a particular use ; that although it were found in a region of the earth, where you had before imagined, that the foot of man had never reached, you could yet conclude with perfect assurance, that it must be the work of man, the effect neither of chance nor of any inferior intelligence. Ought you not with equal confidence at least to infer an Author of nature and Creator of all things, of supreme intelligence and power, from the manifold, and incomparably superior mani-

festations of wisdom and skill, which the visible universe every where presents? For here what do you find? Not only, as in the works of man, exquisite workmanship, and perfect and complicated mechanism; but this mechanism connected with the higher attributes of vegetable and animal life, possessing the power of voluntary motion, and endued with sensation, with intellect, and with will? Surely the same mode of reasoning, which in the one case conducted you with certainty to man as the author, will not allow you in the other, to stop short of that infinite, eternal, all-perfect intelligence, which we mean to express by the term God. For nothing less than supreme and perfect intelligence can be supposed to be the author and producer of intelligence.

Again, in the midst of a wilderness uninhabited, and previously supposed never to have been visited before by man, you are surprized by finding a well-constructed house, with all the accommodations, the conveniences, the furniture, and the ornaments of a dwelling intended for the residence of men. But no human being makes its appearance, no human voice is heard, and no other vestige of humanity is discovered. But is a doubt indulged for a moment on the subject whether or not it were erected by men? Does the thought once enter the mind, even of the most skeptical, that this fair building may not be the work of human labor and skill; that it may possibly be the work of chance; or that it may have grown up with the trees of the surrounding forest, by the

same power of nature, which brought them forth, and which placed there also the rocks and the mountains?

You have been accustomed to observe the productions of nature and the works of art, and find it easy to distinguish in general the marks by which each is to be known; so that no room for a moment's hesitation is left, in deciding in such a case, as the one in question, what must have been the cause from the effect, the producer from the production, the builder from the building. But something more than this may be affirmed. Not only would you infer that men had been there, though no vestiges of their presence, or of their recent presence were to be discovered; you would pronounce without hesitation, that they must have been men in a state of civilization, acquainted with the arts, possessing instruments, and skilled in the use of them. You would trace the use of the axe, the saw, and the hammer in the execution as clearly, as you did the knowledge of the principles of architecture, and the habits and customs of civilized life in the structure of the building, and in its adaptation to the uses of domestic life.

It is by this same mode of reasoning, so short, so direct, and so conclusive, that we are carried on from the contemplation of this stupendous fabric of the universe, and all its wonderful contrivances and provisions, to the knowledge of the supreme intelligence, and Almighty being, by whom it was designed and constructed. The existence of the creator is seen in

the creation ; and the character of the workman is stamped upon the work. We find him not indeed, like the painter, the sculptor, the architect, an object of our senses. In the strong language of Oriental figure, “ we go forward and he is not there, and backward, but we perceive him not ; on the left hand, where he doth work, but we cannot behold him, and on the right he hideth himself, that we cannot perceive him.” Yet do the visible traces of his hand, in what is presented to our view, give us proofs of his being, in no degree less satisfactory, than would be even the vision of his person, were he an object of our senses. In the same manner as in the other case, — where from the building in the wilderness, with all its appendages and accommodations, your conclusion is absolutely without hesitation and without reserve, that men must have been there before, although none were now to be seen. Your conviction of the certainty of this conclusion is even so complete, that it would have received no assignable addition, had you found it actually inhabited by man.

CHAPTER VII.

PROOFS OF THE BEING OF GOD CONTINUED.

IN the first place, then, it is a position about which there can be no dispute, that present existence of anything whatever is a certain proof, that something must have existed always. Because, if it be asserted, that there was ever a time, when there was nothing, — the conclusion is irresistible, that there never could have been anything at any subsequent period. The absolute commencement of being is an impossibility.

Whatever now is, must either exist of itself independently, and consequently from eternity, or, if ever it began to be, must have derived its being from something that did exist before ; since it is an obvious impossibility, that it should have caused its own being. There can be no medium between dependent and independent ; *nothing* can ever of itself become something. Take any object, or any being whatever, the one self-existent being only excepted ; take any living thing, you may trace it back to its origin in a being preceding, by which it was produced. You are perfectly sure, that it did not produce itself, did not come into being of itself, did not begin to be, without something existing before as the cause of its being. And the same is true of this parent being ; and if you proceed on thus in tracing the succession, through which exist-

ence has been transmitted through indefinite generations, there is no point at which you can stop, till you arrive at a being, whose existence had no beginning, and whose cause of being is in himself, and not in anything external to himself.

But this self-existence, it will be said, is incomprehensible; and how can I believe that, which I can neither understand, nor about which I can have any distinct conception? It is indeed incomprehensible. But I am not sure that it is more so, than many things, about which we have no hesitation. I am not certain that the self-existence of God is more incomprehensible, than the communicated or derived existence of any created being; and that we have not as clear conceptions, and as satisfactory, of the one as of the other. And if the darkness that hangs over the subject, and our limited views are no obstacles to our faith in the latter, I am unable to see why it should be in the former.

How extremely narrow and limited must be the range of our faith, if we refuse it to all that we are unable to comprehend! How much is there in our frame, in our powers, in our very being, that we are unable to understand, but are compelled to believe! How many things in the constitution of nature,—how many in every intelligent, every animal, and every vegetable life, and even in every particle of inanimate matter,—as really beyond the comprehension of a finite being, as the self-existence of the great Author of all!

Think of that great principle of attraction, by which

distant bodies act upon each other, by which the whole universe is bound together, by which all the movements of the great bodies of nature are governed. Think of the power of the magnet imparting to the needle its mysterious properties of alternate attraction and repulsion, and giving with unerring exactness the true direction to its point ! Whenever in either of these cases you find yourself able to understand the whole, you may require, as the condition of your faith in God, to be able to comprehend the Almighty to perfection.

In what we demand as the ground of our faith, let us be neither unreasonable nor inconsistent. Let us not refuse our assent in one case, upon evidence on which we should readily give it in another. Of your own present existence you have the highest possible certainty, that of consciousness. But is your conviction, to any perceptible degree, less strong of the past existence of your ancestors to the tenth generation ? though of this you have neither the evidence of consciousness, nor the testimony of your senses, nor is it a thing susceptible of demonstration. Now the same process of reasoning, which carries you back to a distant generation of your ancestors, will not stop there. If you follow it faithfully, as far as it leads, it will conduct you to the being of God. For why do you believe in the existence of your ancestors of the tenth generation ? It is because you know, that the race of man is continued by succession. As you had parents yourself, they also must have had parents. And however far you proceed, the same must

take place. Each generation being successively parents of the following, and children of the preceding, through an uninterrupted series, till you have arrived at a first pair, from which the whole series sprung.

Now, through whatever length of time the human race has existed in this manner, and through whatever number of generations it has passed, we know that it must have had a beginning. For whatever exists by succession is dependent in all its parts; that is, every single part depends on the immediately preceding. But, as there must have been a time, when the series commenced, no matter whether it were at the tenth or the ten thousandth link in the series, you must then find a cause out of itself and independent of itself, sufficient to account for its production. For nothing can be more obvious, than that at no part of the series and at no period of the succession could it have any more the power of originating itself, than at the present.

This has been well illustrated by a familiar example. A chain is suspended before you. You see that the lowest link hangs by the next above it, and that by the third, and so on as far as your eye reaches. You are asked what supports the chain. Will you think the question answered by saying, that each link is supported by the next above it? Let the chain be supposed to rise beyond the extent of your vision. You still know, that at whatever distance be the end of it, it must be supported by something out of itself. If there were five or ten links, no one

will pretend, that the chain could hang self-supported. If the number be increased, will it become the less necessary to suppose such a supporting power?

Now applying this reasoning to the case before us; as in the example of the chain, so in the succession of the generations of men, how far soever the imagination is carried back, you find no satisfaction, nothing on which to rest, but the supposition of an adequate external power, in which the series has its origin, and on which it is suspended.

For it is not to be overlooked, that this series of successive beings is not merely of the nature of antecedents and consequents, where there is the relation of parts only, without any mutual dependence; as would be the case of the chain lying on the ground, instead of being suspended; or a procession of men, following each other, where there is no action of one upon another. On the contrary, it is of the nature of cause and effect, each term in the series being successively the effect of that which goes before, and the cause of that which follows. At whatever point then you stop, you have come to an effect without a cause, unless you recur to one out of the series, independent of it, and of sufficient power and intelligence to account for the effect.

Nor is it only to man, that this reasoning applies. It is applicable with equal force to everything that has life, and exists by succession. It is accordingly applicable to every animal and every vegetable production, as well as to man. Not the smallest portion of organized matter, not the lowest grade of animal



or vegetable life can be accounted for, by the supposed operation of any mechanical or chemical processes of nature. These never yet gave life to the smallest animalcule, that is invisible to the naked eye, any more, than to the noblest beast that ranges the forest. And as every animal is known to have sprung from a parent animal, so has every vegetable production grown from a parent seed or a parent stock. Not a tree, a shrub, nor the meanest plant is brought forth by the earth of itself, but is the offspring of one of the same kind, that existed before. The seed, which vegetates a blade of grass, grew itself on a blade of grass. The acorn, which produces an oak, was itself the produce of an oak, which in its turn sprang from an acorn, the fruit of a preceding tree. This is the process of nature ; a process, which has been going on from the beginning ; and at whatever distance you imagine the beginning to have been, you have only the choice of assuming, that the acorn which produced the tree, or the tree which produced the acorn, was the first in the series ; and you have then to say, what produced this first acorn, or first tree.

This difficulty was very pleasantly got over by some of the ancient atheistic philosophers, who accounted for the original production of all animal and vegetable natures by maintaining, that the earth at first brought forth of itself trees, animals, and men, imperfect indeed in its earliest essays, but, at length, the work was brought to perfection, and the whole fell into the regular and orderly state, in which it has continued ever since.

But this theory, if it be adopted, seems not to be quite satisfactory. For if nature produced the first men, and animals, and trees in this manner, how is it to be accounted for, that no such power of nature is witnessed now? Why is it, that the earth has ceased to bring them forth in this manner, unless it be (and this is fatal to the scheme), that there is an intelligent being, the author of nature, the designing cause of all, who operated thus at first, but ceased so to operate after having established other laws, and another process for the continuance and multiplication of the various species of living things? Without the supposition of such a being, what satisfactory reason can be assigned for the fact, that the same effects do not occasionally take place now, which by the hypothesis took place at the beginning?

It will not be pretended, that experience and observation furnish any evidence of the exercise of any power of nature for imparting to mere lifeless matter the very lowest grade of animal or vegetable life. The power which gave being to all things was certainly guided by intelligence, and the Being accordingly by whom it was exerted in framing the world and the beings that inhabit it, an intelligent Being. The proofs of this are innumerable; and so infinitely various and equally decisive, that there is scarcely room for selection.

Who that contemplates the heavenly bodies in all their brightness, and grandeur, and order, and motions, can doubt, whether they are the work of chance or of

design? Who that observes the relation they bear to our earth, and their agency in the agreeable vicissitudes of day and night, and the regular and unceasing succession of the seasons, with all their beneficial influences, can doubt, whether the whole be the effect of contrivance and design, directed to a certain end? Who that considers the structure of the globe itself, the disposition and arrangement of the parts which compose its surface, the atmosphere that surrounds it, with all its wonderful phenomena, and various influences and uses, rendering the earth fruitful, and a fit habitation for innumerable classes of living things, formed for action and for happiness, can for a moment allow the thought, that it can be the work of any other, than a Being capable of foreseeing and intending all these effects? Who is not filled with admiration of the wisdom and skill manifested in the wonderful fulness of nature; in the infinite gradations and forms of life; in the boundless variety of specific natures, while, at the same time, specific uniformity is united with infinite individual variety in each several species; the ample provision found in the fertility of the earth for the support, continuance, and multiplication of each; the laws by which, while they multiply and replenish the earth, they are prevented from intermingling so, as by monstrous productions to mar the order, and symmetry, and regular gradation of the system; the instinct by which all are led to the choice of sustenance suited to their nature, and the prospective care with which such sustenance is provided for them, in the regions where they are severally placed?

These and ten thousand other things of a similar kind force themselves upon our thoughts, when we allow ourselves to think at all. And who can reflect upon them, and yet doubt, whether or not they are indications of intelligence and wise design?

From these views, turn now to the contemplation of an individual being of any species. Examine it with care. How exactly do you find all its several parts, its organs for various functions, fitted to each other, and exactly adapted to their respective uses, and necessary to its perfection, its well-being, and perhaps even its existence! And whence these accurate correspondences, these nice adaptations? Were they, or were they not, provided by a Being, who foresaw their uses, and intended to provide for them? Examine the curious structure of any one of those organs. Will you discover anything in the eye to convince you that it was intended for seeing, the ear for hearing, the hand for the various works in which it is employed?

An instrument, representing the distances, positions, magnitudes, and motions of all the bodies belonging to our Solar System, is a wonderful contrivance, and a wonderful piece of mechanism. It is a work of genius, skill, and science. Who ever doubted it, that had the opportunity of examining one?

What then must be thought of that intelligence which contrived, and that skill and power that produced and governs the vast system itself, of which this instrument is but a very imperfect representation; and not only so, but has peopled every part of it with

myriads of living beings of various orders, such as by no finite skill can be brought into this representation?

The proof of an intelligent first cause of all things, seems to me to be in itself clear, intelligible, and conclusive. And the conviction produced by it is not a little strengthened by a consideration of the only alternative that remains to him, who rejects it. That is chance. If the universe was not the work of design, it was the work of chance.

But what is chance? Can it be in any proper sense the cause of anything whatever? Does it express anything more, than our ignorance of the cause of that, to which we apply the term, and the laws by which it is governed? As far as we annex any definite meaning to the term, its characteristic is irregularity, disorder. It expresses the absence of all that order and consistency, and relation of one thing to another, which is the ground of calculation, of expectation, and of confidence.

How will it then account for any single appearance in the works of nature? They are all the reverse of this;—order, beauty, usefulness, intimate and universal relationship between all things that exist; nothing single, independent, and unrelated to the rest.

If all be the work of chance, how is it that we find everywhere, in the works of nature, the operation of uniform and invariable laws? So that we can judge and calculate with almost unerring certainty?

Why does the oak never appear in the form of the poplar, nor put forth the blossom of the rose, nor

yield the fruit of the apple-tree, nor even shoot forth one solitary leaf, that is not of the peculiar figure, and texture, and color, which characterize its species? Now if chance will not account for the smallest part, how can it be supposed to have produced the whole?

Would you know the power of chance, be present at the drawing of a lottery, and try your chance at predicting what prize or blank shall come up to each number, as it is drawn out. Or, if this experiment suffice not, try another. Visit a printer's office. Throw the types promiscuously together, and then try your chance at producing a regular composition, by placing the letters, as you draw them at random from that mass. How long will it be ere you will chance to produce one intelligible sentence, or express one distinct idea in any one of all the languages there are, or ever have been in the world?

But were you in this way to produce a regular poem or history, the chance by which it were brought about would bear no proportion to that, which must be supposed in producing the orderly arrangement of the whole visible universe.

It is, indeed, far more credible, that all the books you read were composed in this manner, than that all the things you see, were brought by chance into existence, and into the order in which you see them.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNITY.

HAVING considered the great doctrine that is at the foundation of all religion, the being of God, as it stands opposed to Atheism : I shall now endeavor to show, how it stands opposed to Polytheism.

And the first remark that occurs is, that the whole of the abstract reasoning by which we prove a first cause, and intelligent author of all things, is equally conclusive to prove, that there is but one. The same also may be said of the argument drawn from the existence of the universe, or from the existence of any single object or being. The whole force of the argument is directed to a single cause, from which all proceeds. Any consideration, by which is suggested more than one, must weaken the force of the proof of one. The whole weight of the argument from effect to cause consists in its conducting us to a single cause. By the supposition of more than one, the force of the reasoning is destroyed.

Again, the attributes, usually regarded as belonging to the divine nature, are consistent only with its unity. Were there more than one, neither omnipresence, nor omniscience, nor infinite power could be shown to belong to either of them. As far therefore as these attributes are proved to belong to God, they prove also that God is one, and that there can be but one.

Again, if there were no other argument for the unity of God than this, that all the phenomena of the universe are as well accounted for by the supposition of one God, as of more than one, — it would be worthy of consideration. But more than this may be said. The existence of the universe is accounted for in a far more satisfactory manner by the supposition of its being the work of one, than of many minds.

But the argument to be relied upon more than all others for proof of the unity of God, and the force of which is, at the same time, most readily perceived, is that which is drawn from the unity of design, which is so visible in the works of nature. For as the proof of an intelligent cause of all things is found in the manifold marks of design everywhere presented to us, so does the singleness of that cause appear with equal clearness in the unity of the design, which we thus discover.

Beauty, order, harmony, correspondence of parts, which constitute a whole, and mutual adaptation of those parts to one another, and of the whole to certain uses, suggest not only intelligence and design, but unity; that one mind, one will directs the work. Quite a different result we look for, where several minds, independent of each other, are concerned together. We expect to see marks of conflicting opinions, and opposing wills. I do not mean that union, coöperation, and entire consent are not possible between several independent minds; but it can exist only where there is perfect equality and

perfect similarity. But in no system of polytheism is this pretended. Those, who believe in many gods, believe them to be extremely various in their natures and character, differing from each other in their attributes, and not less so in their dispositions, and purposes, and wills.

Now the argument is, and it is certainly one of great force, that the unity of design manifested in the creation is conclusive, — that it cannot be either the joint or the separate work of such beings as were the objects of heathen faith and worship. Nothing was to be expected of such beings but discord and hostility, and a system composed of ill assorted parts, contradictory ends pursued, and only confusion and inconsistency attained.

How different from this the actual scene of the visible universe ! everywhere mutual relation and dependence ; each part adjusted exactly to each adjoining, filling the precise place where it was wanted, and where, without it, there would have been a deficiency. Not only does this adaptation of parts to each other, this relationship and mutual subserviency to the accomplishment of a single end, appear in a few clear and obvious cases ; — it is a character that runs through the whole ; it is discovered often where least expected, where it is usually overlooked, and sometimes where, previous to examination, the opposite character was supposed. Such, for example, are some of the opposite powers of physical nature ; acting in direct hostility to each other, yet both so adjusted as to produce harmony, and to coöperate in

the execution of the same design. Such also are some of those objects of nature, which to a careless view seem useless, — mere redundances, — perhaps even worse than useless, — positive blemishes, impairing the beauty and perfection of the whole ; but which a nearer inspection and careful study show to be essential parts, contributing to the perfection of the whole.

Instances and analogies to illustrate the subject present themselves in various forms ; — in the laws of vegetable and animal life, like those of the physical world, the same everywhere, and everywhere attended with the same phenomena and the same effects ; — the same forms, the same properties, and the same habits, peculiar to each, manifested whenever and wherever they exist, in all ages, and in every region of the earth.

Unity of a singular kind, and very clearly marking a single purpose and will, is seen in the regular gradation of being, and all the relations of mutual dependence which it exhibits. From the meanest vegetable, up to the highest created intelligence, the gradations and the varieties are innumerable ; yet so are they all allied together, and mutually dependent, that we do not know that any one could be spared without affecting the condition of many, if not of all the rest ; and we do know that many of them could not be spared without essential harm, and perhaps even absolute destruction to some of the rest. Was it one mind or many, that projected such a scheme, every part of which was made to depend upon every other part ?

Such views as these certainly lead us, most naturally and forcibly, to the thought of a single being by whom this whole scheme was projected; a single wisdom to contrive, and a single power to execute. At least, they serve to show strikingly how inconsistent with all that we see in nature is the whole system of gods independent of each other, presiding over particular portions of nature, or regions of the earth, or races of beings, or nations of men, or powers of nature.

Again, other thoughts tend to the same issue, and fortify the conviction, that so far, at least, as respects this globe of earth and all that live upon it, one being only is to be acknowledged as the creator and governor.

One law of attraction binds all together. The same great luminary sends its light and heat alike to every portion of the globe, by the same immutable laws. The elements of which the earth is composed, however variously combined, are everywhere the same, and everywhere subjected to the same laws, and everywhere exercising the same powers. One atmosphere covers the whole earth, everywhere accompanied with the same phenomena under similar circumstances; producing the same effects upon animal and vegetable life, and equally important to them in the most distant regions. And as to vegetable and animal life, in the infinity of different forms in which they appear, these also we find to be subject everywhere to the same laws. In every country, in every climate over the whole earth, the same pro-

cess is ever going on, the same phenomena exhibited, the same incessant and untiring labor, and the same order ; production, growth, maturity, decay, dissolution, and reproduction.

All these connecting circumstances, everywhere alike, what do they most naturally suggest ? sameness or diversity of counsel ; a single mind directing the whole, or many independent of each other ?

Nor is the argument weakened, as it might seem to be at first, by the warfare of hostile elements and hostile powers, which is constantly going on. Since the more we know, the more we examine, and the better we become acquainted with the principles and laws of the universe, the more are we able to see how the combined influences of powers of nature, operating in direct opposition to each other, contribute to produce a single effect, which could only be produced by such conflict. Thus all extremes are brought together, and made to unite and concur in producing beauty, and harmony, and order. Attraction and repulsion, love and hatred, light and darkness, cold and heat ; all these, acting and reacting, and combined in various proportion and in various order, manifest by the effects they produce, that they are severally put in action, not by different and hostile powers, but by a single power directing its energies and its instruments to a single aim.

After the same manner again may we reason with respect to the natural hostility which we observe between several species of creatures, and which disturbs us so much at first, as seemingly incompatible with

the unity for which we contend. It furnishes, rightly considered, no such objection ; but on the contrary, serves to strengthen the argument.

It is a groundless conclusion altogether, however naturally the thought may have arisen at first view, that we are to trace to a different origin the several species of living things, whose nature it is to subsist by preying upon one another ; to infer from these hostile natures, that they must have been created by different independent powers, between which there was a similar hostility, and a disposition to destroy each other's work. Such an imagination is seen to be without foundation, when it is considered, that no other means of subsistence are provided for them. Had they been created by different beings, they would not have been left thus unprovided for, dependent upon another and a hostile power for the very means of sustaining their being, which had been neglected by the power that gave them being.

This fact in their condition leaves no room to doubt, that the same being is the common parent of the beast and bird of prey, and of the defenceless race which constitute the only food that is provided for them. The same God has given life to the swallow, and to the insect upon which it feeds, and has equally provided for the sustenance and well being of both.

The argument for the divine unity, drawn from multiplied marks of unity of design, in all the objects and beings by which we are immediately surrounded, will gather strength by extending our view beyond

the earth upon which we dwell. Our globe, though complete in itself, making a single whole, as relates to the parts of which it is composed, is yet itself but a part, and a very inconsiderable one, of the great system to which it belongs; all the parts of which are bound together by immutable laws, everywhere manifesting the same unity of purpose. From the same central Orb are sent forth those influences, by which the whole system is enlightened, and warmed, and cheered, and the remotest orbs are kept in the places assigned to them, and the courses they are destined to pursue. What more satisfactory proof could we desire, than such a fact presents, of one uniform wisdom and care, by which that provision is made, presiding over the whole? Not only does this apply to those great bodies composing our system, whose tracks are such, as never to interfere by crossing each other's path; it applies equally to those eccentric and seemingly lawless bodies, which pass through the regions of space in other and various directions. These also are connected, and kept in place, and prevented from causing disturbance and confusion, by the same ties.

The comet, which has been travelling through the regions of space, beyond the reach of mortal eye, for centuries, is drawn back again, at its appointed time, by the same power, which holds the planets in their places, and causes them to perform their destined round.

Beyond the bounds of our system, our knowledge, and our power of observation is extremely limited,

yet not so as wholly to preclude all reasoning on the subject ; though the topics of reasoning can be but few and uncertain. The relations of our system to all beyond it are but little known ; and the analogies, or points of resemblance, from which proofs of unity of design might be drawn, are but few. Indeed the only sensible bond of union between us and all that is beyond the bounds of our system, of which we have any certainty, is that of light. But this alone, were there nothing else, forms a connexion, that renders it highly probable, that the parts, thus connected, belong to the same single dominion. That there is, however, another bond of union far more powerful and important, is exceedingly probable. That there is such a common principle or power, pervading the whole, keeping the several systems, as it does the several parts of our own system, in their proper places, is the only probable conjecture, by which to account for their maintaining forever the same order and relative positions. That they are in fact preserved from rushing together in hostile confusion, on the one hand, or, on the other, flying off into infinite space, is enough to furnish strong ground for the belief, that one infinite, all-pervading, all-governing mind, established and continues to preserve the whole order of nature ; not of this system only, but of the whole universe.

I now close this chapter with a single reflection. There is one God. With what reverence should we think of his being, with what diligence should we study his nature, with what cheerful piety render to

him the homage of our hearts, with what unreserved submission bow to his authority, with what steady resolution obey his will.

There is no other God but one. Let us not, on the one hand, incur the guilt of withholding from him the glory that is his due ; nor, on the other hand, of giving to another the honor that is due to him alone.

CHAPTER IX.

OMNISCIENCE AND OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD.

THE being of an intelligent author of nature is a primary truth of Natural Religion. But how does reason teach us to think and to speak of this Being? What are the attributes she assigns to him? What the character, in which he is presented to her view?

Had we no other guide, what are the conceptions of the Deity to which we might be led by a contemplation of the visible creation, the constitution of nature, and the course of events?

With all the light that revelation has cast on this most lofty subject of human inquiry, the wisest, most enlightened, and most favored of mortals, have confessed their knowledge imperfect, and their views obscure and partial. When all the light that is permitted, perhaps all of which they were capable, has been poured in, they have exclaimed,—"Lo, these are a part of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him!" In the language, not of complaint, nor of despondency, but of admiration and reverence, they ask, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?"

The language of nature and reason is here the same, as that of revelation. The same light, which

discovers to us what may be known of God, and is sufficiently clear to present a lively image of his greatness, serves also to show how much must be yet unseen, beyond the view and above the comprehension of a finite mind, and thus to convince us, "that his greatness is unsearchable." Yet some of the divine perfections are as distinctly perceived by the light of nature, as the evidences of his being. Thus it may be shown, that the Being on which all others depend, and from which all others are derived, must be without beginning. He is self-existent, and eternity is implied in the very notion of self-existence. Otherwise it would be self-production, an absurdity too obvious to require a moment's reflection. It implies also immensity. No limits of place, any more than of time, can be assigned to that Being, who created all things, who was before all things, and of whose existence itself no prior or external cause is to be assigned, or can be imagined. But if it be thus infinite, and one simple, uncompounded, and undivided intelligence, the unavoidable consequence seems to be a perpetual omnipresence. This attribute is accordingly one of those, to which the contemplation of the divine nature, by the lights which reason gives, seems irresistibly to lead. It is silently confessed by every reflecting believer in the being of God, as an object of worship. Wherever he is, the prayer he addresses is an acknowledgment of his presence, as the object of worship, and the director of events. And as he believes him present to himself, so has he no doubt of his presence at the same time to the worshipper, who

calls upon him in the most distant region of the globe.

But is this an attribute of which we have any clear and distinct conception? Is it not like self-existence, eternity, and infinity, quite incomprehensible? And if it be wholly beyond the reach of our conceptions, whence is it, that the idea of it is so readily received, and how becomes it a part of our natural notions of the Deity? Can any other account be given of it, than that all the same phenomena, which lead to the belief of the existence of an intelligent author of nature, require also his universal presence?

There is certainly nothing analogous in ourselves, or in anything that falls under our observation, that serves in any considerable measure to prepare the mind for the conception of this attribute. We have ourselves a narrow sphere, within which our being and our activity are confined. We can be present at different places only successively. To be present at one place, we must be absent from all others. The same is true of all other created beings, and of every agent in nature, of which we have any knowledge. All have local limits to their presence and power. They can be and act only within certain bounds. These they can change, but cannot enlarge. You can shift your position in the little room about which you move, so as to occupy every part of it in succession, but you cannot fill it, you cannot occupy it all at one time. Those powers of nature, which might seem at first to form an exception to this remark, will be found to present none in reality. For of those

powers, which seem to us to be exerted beyond the subject in which they are supposed to reside, we know nothing but the sensible effects. And as we are ignorant what the power itself is, and how it is exerted, it is impossible for us to know how extensive is the sphere of its presence. The power of attraction, by which all material bodies act on each other, seems to be equally diffused through the universe; and if it could be proved to be anything else, than the constant agency of the Deity operating by certain laws, it would furnish an exception; but there is nothing that should lead us to this conclusion, but the contrary. The power which binds together the parts of every material substance, and that which draws the most distant toward each other, are not, we have reason to believe, the independent property of the objects themselves, but are diffused throughout the extent of the creation, and express the agency of a being, whose presence fills the universe.

There is another point, in which we have no analogy to help our conceptions in speaking of the divine omnipresence. It is this, that all sensible objects, and all created beings with which we are acquainted, as they are limited to some portion of space, exclude from it all others, so that no two can occupy the same space at the same time. But the omnipresence of God implies his coëxistence with every other substance, whether material or immaterial. No being excludes his presence, and his presence is no impediment to the simultaneous presence of any other being.

But to understand the manner of the divine Being, to comprehend his nature, and have an adequate or clear conception of those perfections, which belong to him alone, is one thing. It is another and quite different thing to have such proof of their reality, as to be a rational ground of faith. The latter we may have, where the former is not to be obtained. And with our imperfect faculties, we are not to be surprised, if this is the most we find ourselves able to attain to in our contemplations on an infinite being.

Whenever, from any view of the subject, we have come to acquiesce in the omnipresence of God, we shall find little difficulty in passing from that to another attribute, his knowledge of all things. If we believe in the universal presence of God, we can have little difficulty in admitting his universal knowledge. Of this, indeed, as of the other, we have very little falling within our own experience, which serves to assist our conception. Our own knowledge is limited, as is the sphere of our presence. It spreads over but a small space, and is confined to a few objects. As far as it extends, it is often imperfect and incomplete. Nor does it embrace what is within its limits all at once. Its view is successive. It passes from object to object, and can fix on but a single one or part of one at a time. If it takes an extensive range, and has comprehensive views, it is by the rapidity of its motion from one to another, and not by resting on many at the same time. But we are certain that the knowledge of God must be different from this. Filling all

space with his presence, surrounding and pervading all things, and constantly exerting his power in producing and preserving all things, all must be at once present to his view. Nor need we find any difficulty in admitting, what with our limited capacities it is impossible for us to comprehend, this attribute of the supreme and infinite intelligence. It indeed follows of course, when we have once admitted, that intelligence which is implied in his being the author and cause of all things, and that universal presence, and sustaining power, without which it is impossible to account for the continuance of the order and system of nature.

Still the thought is too vast and unmanageable for our feeble capacity. In the attempt to grasp it, we are lost and bewildered. We know how easily we are ourselves perplexed and distracted by a multiplicity of objects, and find it impossible to conceive of a single mind, by one simple attention perceiving everything that is, and all that is taking place, throughout the boundless universe, from the flight of a comet that is travelling through the remotest regions of space, to the smallest dust that floats in the atmosphere.

We find it easier for our reason to be convinced of the divine omnipresence and omniscience, than for the imagination to be brought to rest on the subject. We even startle at the seeming impossibility of that, of the reality of which we are convinced by irresistible evidence. Yet there is a process of the mind, by which our conceptions may be in some measure as-

sisted, and this reluctance of the imagination in a degree overcome. It is by taking in successively in small portions, what we in vain attempt to grasp at once. "On whatever spot of the creation we fix, it is easy for us to conceive that God is there, and that he is the observer and the witness of the objects and the facts, which employ our own contemplation. We can thence depart and traverse in thought the remotest regions, and still carry with us the same presence and inspection. If we contemplate the heavens above us, we may there behold him, directing the planets in their courses, and holding the stars in their appointed stations." We can then come down to the earth, and see him appointing to every order of animate and inanimate nature its metes and bounds, and find him everywhere and in all, not the idle observer, but the soul and animating principle.

Thus, though we cannot take in the idea of omnipresence and omniscience at once, we can do it in detail. Though we cannot actually conceive of God as everywhere, we can conceive him to be there, wherever we fix our thought, and that he takes cognizance of every object and of every action, to which we direct our thought.

It is thus too, that the sacred writers teach us to contemplate this subject, and by a lively view help the imagination to take hold of it. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit, whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hades, thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost

parts of the sea ; there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

Speculations on these attributes of the Deity are among the noblest that can employ our thoughts. But they have yet a higher recommendation. They are interesting in a practical view ; and the speculative truth ought not to be separated from its practical influence.

Too apt we are, however just and rational our settled opinions on the subject may be, to have the divine presence and inspection associated in our imagination exclusively with certain times and places, and to confine accordingly to those consecrated times and places our feelings of reverence, and our acts of worship. This tendency to local, temporary, and intermittent piety, this disposition to confine the feelings and expressions of our devotion to the house of prayer, the public assembly, and the hour of worship, should be corrected. The true worship of the Father, in spirit and in truth, is limited neither to the temple on the Jewish or the Samaritan mountain, nor yet to the Christian church. Without that sacred book, which so often reminds us, that God dwells not "in temples made with hands, and that the heaven of heavens cannot contain him," the light of nature alone may teach us to see and acknowledge the present Deity alike in every place, and in every object ; to conceive, that wherever we are, we are alike surrounded by his presence, and subject to his inspection. In our hours of retirement and privacy, he is the witness of our purposes and thoughts ; in

business or in study, we are still under his watchful eye. In seasons of relaxation and society, in the public crowd, in the select circle, in scenes of mirth and festivity, he is still near us, to receive the homage of our silent adoration and praise, to witness and to accept the grateful thought, which rises, from the sense of privileges and enjoyments, to Him, who is their great source and bestower.

We are not, then, to associate the thought of the divine presence and inspection exclusively with particular times and places. Yet, on the other hand, it is not for beings like us, — imperfect, made up so much of sense and passion, and so influenced by circumstances of time and place, — to reject wholly their use. We need them to awaken our slumbering attention, and to give it, when awakened, the right direction. Without the return of stated seasons, which call us off from the cares and interests of life, our minds might seldom or never be conducted into those trains of reflection, which discover to us the constant presence and agency of the Most High ; and were there not particular spots, which we have consecrated to his worship, and where we are reminded by special services of his presence, and of our dependence and duty, it is to be feared, that too soon we should cease to recollect him in other places, and “ God would not be in all our thoughts.”

Again, this universal presence and inspection of God, may be contemplated as a guard upon conduct, a restraint upon the passions, a motive to self-government, and all right action.

In the hour of temptation, how often might the crime be prevented, the career of vice be stopped, the entrance on a forbidden course arrested, and an immortal being saved, by the single thought, at the critical moment, "Thou God seest me." Heathen moralists have, with great sagacity and just knowledge of human nature, recommended as a security against unworthy actions, that we imagine ourselves constantly in the presence of some venerable person, whose character and authority, if he were actually present, would be an effectual restraint. And how many a youth has been indebted for his preservation from folly, and vice, and ruin, to a similar device! He has shielded himself in every assault of temptation, and has stimulated himself to diligence and virtue, by having constantly before his mind those valued friends, in whose judgment he confides, whose lessons of virtue he remembers, and in whose presence he wishes again to appear, without trembling, and without a blush.

He thinks of a father, whose kindness he cannot consent to abuse, whose hopes he would not disappoint, and whose virtuous eye would penetrate through the thin disguise of guilt;—a mother, who has watched over his infancy, and formed his childhood to the love of excellence; who is now, with anxious hope waiting for the full grown virtues and improvements, together with the honors and success of maturer years, and who could not survive the knowledge of his dishonor and ruin.

But if such be the effect of the mere ideal presence of an earthly parent whom we venerate, or friend whose esteem and good opinion we value, what firmness and constancy, what resolution and power of self-government might not be expected to result from the habitual sense of the real presence of the Great Parent of the Universe! To him, who assents to the first truths of the religion of nature, there can be no occasion for conjuring up a fictitious witness, as a motive or a restraint. The eye of omniscience beholds him, and he can need no other witness to strengthen his motive to that virtue which He will approve. A holy and righteous Judge is present, and he can need nothing to increase the restraint on those actions which would incur His displeasure.

Once more, the contemplation of the divine presence and inspection is to be valued for the support it gives to the virtuous mind. Besides an ever present motive to a virtuous course, we need, when that course is pursued, an ever present source of solace and support. In all circumstances and in every condition we need it. In some, to which we are liable, it is of great importance.

Will you say that virtue is its own reward? that the virtuous mind finds in its own consciousness all that it needs for satisfaction and support? This would be true of a being of perfect goodness, and in a state of perfection; but to beings of imperfect goodness, and in a state of imperfection, qualifications and exceptions must be taken into the account. Besides,

why is it that the consciousness of virtue gives peace, support, and a sense of security? Is it not the belief of a righteous government only, and an unseen witness of our thoughts and actions, that can inspire this sense of security, that can furnish this support and peace?

The good man, together with the consciousness of virtue, has also a depressing and discouraging sense of imperfection and fault. How consoling to him the thought, that He, by whom his life is to be guided and his lot determined, is always present, penetrating the inmost recesses of the heart, acquainted with all the motives and springs of action; that He knows the whole of the case; that if He sees the weakness that has yielded to temptation, He sees also the tenderness of heart that is expressed in humble penitence, and is not a stranger to the first effort of virtuous resolution to recover the path of duty.

Besides what he finds within himself, there are external circumstances in which he feels the value of a sense of the divine presence and inspection. Is he the object of dislike, or disregard, or neglect in the world; his virtues overlooked, his good deeds disparaged, his motives misunderstood or misrepresented, and his character mistaken by men; how consoling to feel assured that there is one being to whose view all is perfectly open and clear, and by whom he can never fear to be either overlooked or mistaken!

Wherever he may be, whatever his condition, whatever his pursuits, to the man who is conscious of

pure intentions and steadfast purposes of virtue, no thought can be more delightful than that these are perfectly known to the great and good being on whom he is wholly dependent, in whose hands are all his interests, at whose disposal is his whole destiny.

CHAPTER X.

FOREKNOWLEDGE.

IN speaking of the knowledge of God in my last chapter, I confined my observations to the consideration of it, as it relates to the present time and to present existence. But the omniscience of God has been usually understood to comprehend in it something still more. It is explained to mean, not only a perfect knowledge of all that is, but of all that ever will be. Accordingly the distinct Foreknowledge of future events, either as a part of this attribute, or as a distinct one, has been usually attributed to the Author of nature.

The Foreknowledge of God, extending to all that takes place, is frequently expressed by the sacred writers of the Old and the New Testament. It is implied in prophecy, since, to be predicted, events must be foreknown. It is implied also in all that relates to a superintending providence ; and the whole history of divine revelation, and the whole scriptures in which it is given, are but the history of the providence of God ; exhibiting examples and manifestations of the faithful care and kind provisions of the Father of the Universe, extending to all his creatures, and reaching to all their interests, to all their exigences, and the whole of their being. Nor

is our knowledge of this wonderful and sublime attribute drawn only from a written revelation. It makes a part of our natural notions of the Author of nature, sovereign of the world, and disposer of events. A distinct foreknowledge of all that is future, as well as a knowledge of all that is past and present, has accordingly been usually comprehended in the omniscience of God, or been considered as constituting a distinct attribute.

Nor is the perfect knowledge of the future, further above our comprehension, or of more difficult conception, than the complete knowledge of all that is present. It requires not a perceptibly greater stretch of the imagination to take in the former, than the latter. When once we have been led by satisfactory reasons to embrace this, as, notwithstanding the incomprehensibleness of the thing, not only possible, but an undoubted truth; we shall find very little additional difficulty, which should induce us to refuse our assent to the other.

For let us consider for a moment, what the foreknowledge of God is, and in what it must be supposed to consist. Now, we can conceive of this, as of the other divine perfections, only by considering what there is analogous to it in ourselves. But whatever degree of foresight we have, it can extend no farther, and to no greater degree of exactness, than our knowledge of the causes that are to produce the effects thus foreseen. Our knowledge of the one will be the exact measure of the other. And may we not be allowed most confidently to infer by analogy, that

precisely the same will be the case with the Supreme intelligence? And if so, his prescience may be complete, extending with unerring certainty to all futurities. For it cannot be doubted, that he who made all things, and is everywhere present, must perfectly understand the whole constitution of things, which he has established, the nature and the power of all the subordinate causes, which he has himself put in operation, together with all the circumstances, which can affect their operation, which are also of his appointment, and subject to his control. Thus it is that we come to have some definite idea, however inadequate our conception may be, of the divine foreknowledge. It is foreseeing all things in the causes, which are to produce them, which causes he has himself originally appointed, continues to superintend and direct, and is able to limit, control, or suspend, as his purposes may require. In this way, I observe, we come to some definite, though distant and imperfect, apprehension of the subject. We have analogy to help us, and our own experience to remove the first impression of intrinsic incredibility.

With our finite nature and very limited capacity, we have some degree of foresight. To many things it extends with a sufficient degree of exactness and certainty, to give us full confidence in our expectations, and enable us to rely with assurance on our calculations of interest or conduct. In respect to others we are left in more or less uncertainty, according to the measure of our experience, the fidelity and sagacity of our observation, or our knowledge of the

causes, which are to produce the effects in question. Now, from the degree of foresight, which, by careful observation, and long experience, and well applied study into the powers and operations of nature, we are capable of acquiring, we can conceive of its being enlarged, with higher powers and more perfect knowledge, in an indefinite degree. Indeed we can prescribe no limits to the possible foresight of a superior intelligence. There seems to be no ground for doubting, that a being, who has perfect knowledge of all that exists now, and of the nature, the power, and the disposition of everything, may also know perfectly all that shall be in future ; especially when to this we add the further consideration, that this being is the sole Author of all, and that whatever changes are to take place, and whatever new powers shall come into operation, must depend solely on his will.

There is a different view of this subject, with which some are better satisfied, and they accordingly give a different representation of the supposed grounds and manner of the divine prescience. It is an act, as they suppose, and results from a capacity, totally distinct in their nature from anything we experience in ourselves. God's knowledge of the future, say they, is not like ours derived, the result of reasoning, and deduction from premises, but immediate, and intuitive. There is no distinction, as with us, of events past, present, and future. All is alike present. The event of a thousand years ago, and that of a thousand years to come, are present to him in the same sense as that of the passing moment. They are not present, the one

by memory, and the other by foresight, but each in a manner of which a finite being can have no conception, — by that incomprehensible attribute of an infinite being, by which infinite duration is, like infinite space, a unit, a point without parts. “A thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years;” eternal ages, a perpetual now, without succession, without change, without progress.

But why should a subject, already sufficiently deep and difficult, be involved in greater obscurity than naturally belongs to it, by being expressed in unintelligible language?

In our disquisitions on this difficult subject, we can carry our ideas with us no further, than they are supported, and our conceptions assisted by analogies drawn from our own experience. Whenever analogy fails, or we forsake it, and resort to conjecture; instead of greater clearness and satisfaction, we shall find the subject rendered more obscure. That the divine knowledge of futurity is by a manner of perception, and by a power entirely different from anything possessed by us, — an immediate act, a simple perception, like that of the present, — may be true. But if it be so, it is for that very reason impossible for us to have any knowledge, as we can have no conception of it. It must be presumptuous then to assert it, and pretend to give any account of it.

The case is like that of a person defective in one of our organs of sense. He may be made to understand, that others have an inlet of knowledge different from any that he possesses. But he is not qualified to

give any account of it. He can indeed have no conception of it, nor could he ever have had any idea of the fact itself, until it was made known to him by those, who possessed this power.

It will then only become us to assert and attempt to explain this character of God's foreknowledge, when he has himself authorized it.

This kind of language, in expressing the nature and manner of the divine foreknowledge of human actions, has probably been resorted to, as an expedient for reconciling this doctrine with human freedom, supposed to be necessary to render man an accountable being, a fit subject of moral government, of reward and punishment, of praise and blame, of being dealt with according to his works. And the difficulty which has suggested it consists in this, that if God foresees the actions of men in the causes that are to produce them, it must be because there is a certain, and, if a certain, a necessary connexion between those causes and the effects which are to follow.

The difficulty here suggested is undoubtedly one of considerable force. Considered in all its bearings, we have perhaps not faculties, that will enable us fully to solve it. But it seems material to observe, that so far as respects the moral government of the world, however it may seem at first view, the weight of the objection lies not exclusively against this manner of explaining the grounds of the divine foreknowledge. The difficulty will remain with nearly the same force on any other supposition. For, what-

ever be the supposition as to the grounds of foreknowledge, the thing itself implies that the event is certain, and cannot possibly fall out otherwise than it is foreseen. Now, if the foreseen action or event be certain, as absolute foresight implies that it is certain, then it cannot fail to take place, and cannot possibly take place otherwise, than it is foreseen. And then the agent himself cannot possibly act otherwise, than it is foreseen he will act. Now, this does not at all affect the question respecting the freedom of human actions; because certainty is to be distinguished from necessity; nor does it affect the question as to the praise or blame, reward or punishment due to them from Him who foresaw the whole future character, and every action of each being, at the time he gave it being, any more upon one supposition of the grounds of that knowledge, than another. The moral difficulty lies, not in the foresight, nor in any *certainty* of their connexion with the causes that produce them, any more, than in the certainty of the event; but in their *necessary* connexion with those causes. And that there may be this certainty, where there is no necessity, may be rendered intelligible by a simple and plain statement.

That every future action of your life is as certain now on the supposition of freedom, as on that of necessity, will appear by taking a single case, and considering an action as already past. The action which you have freely performed to-day was yesterday contingent, in the only sense in which contingency is conceivable; that is, you were free to perform it or

not. Yet how you would use that freedom was then, and had been from eternity as certain, as it is now, that the action has been performed. It was certain too in all its circumstances, and in all the causes immediate and remote which produced it. Of these causes, on the supposition of freedom, one, and a most important one is, the activity of the mind itself, and the power it has over its own actions. Now can it be less credible, that he who constituted the human mind, and knows its exact state, disposition, and character, should be able from this knowledge to foresee how it will in every case be influenced by external motives, and what will be its conduct, than that he should have this foresight in any other unknown and incomprehensible manner? It will not be pretended, that the freest act of the freest being is not an effect produced by an adequate cause. He, who understands the nature and structure of this being, the work of his own hand, far more perfectly than man can understand the simplest machine, may surely be allowed to know what it will perform, and what will be its conduct under any given or supposable circumstances. — It will be perceived that I have no concern here with the general question respecting the freedom of the will in opposition to philosophical necessity, a question which is probably of less practical importance, than the strenuous supporters of either side of the argument imagine. I am concerned, at present, only to show, and that I have endeavored to do, that the divine foreknowledge of human actions is not in itself incompatible with any conceivable de-

gree of freedom in their performance; and that this freedom is not impaired, nor the moral government of the world affected, by the supposition that the foresight of the event is grounded on a perfect knowledge of all the causes by which it is to be produced. There is therefore no reason for resorting to the supposition of something inexplicable in the manner and grounds of the divine foreknowledge, to avoid its interference with human liberty, and reconcile it with moral government; and still less to deny or limit its exercise, on the same account.

There is another view of the subject, which in following the light of nature and reason, will conduct us by a somewhat different course, to the same conclusion respecting the perfection and extent of the divine foreknowledge, and is favorable also to the same opinion of its grounds.

The Creator of all things is also their preserver and governor. He exercises a constant care over the whole creation, extending to everything, the most minute as well as the greatest. This care is evidently exercised upon a plan. Everything is provided for, is part of a scheme or system, in which ends are to be accomplished, for which means are provided. Nothing is fortuitous, nothing is left to chance, nothing stands alone and disconnected from the rest. But everything is related to other things about it, forms a part of the whole, and enters into the general system. Now these provisions are many of them of vast extent, embrace an infinite variety of objects, actions, and events, and stretch through a long duration of

time. Take the history of the human race, the progress of knowledge, of arts, of social improvements, of government ; the revolutions that have taken place, the transfer of knowledge and power from one region and one nation to another, the rise and fall of empires, the origin, growth, glory, decay, and extinction of cities and kingdoms, the lights that have appeared to instruct the world, which have produced memorable eras in the state and condition of the world, the scourges that have been raised up to afflict and punish the nations. Can we have any doubt that the whole of this great outline was originally projected, and its execution provided for? Can we imagine that it was begun without a plan, carried on at hazard, and left to chance?

But if it was a plan, the great events of which were intended, those parts which were intended must have been foreseen. If it was the design, that at such times and in such order certain discoveries and improvements should be made, and thereby certain alterations in the condition of the world take place ; not only these events themselves must have been foreseen, but the manner in which they were to take place, and the circumstances which were to produce them. But the foresight of these implies also the foresight of the whole train of connected causes and effects, which is to end in them ; the omission or the alteration of any one of which, the most minute, might have produced a change in the whole series, ended in a different result, and defeated the original design. The greatest revolution in the affairs of the world,

though brought about by the agency of a single man, must have been connected with a series of events and actions, each depending on the preceding, not one of which could be spared without destroying the whole, and reaching back through the whole history of the world. It may thus depend on the action of a remote ancestor, in itself of the most trifling nature. And the foresight of the event at the end of the series may depend on the foresight of this minute circumstance, and of innumerable others as minute through the whole course of the series.

We are accordingly led by this, as by the other method of speculating, to attribute to the Author of nature and Governor of the world a perfect foreknowledge of all things ; and we perceive additional reasons for resting satisfied, whatever difficulties the subject may labor under, in the view it gives of the nature and the grounds of that attribute.

And while we are convinced of the reality of this attribute, let us consider what are the duties it implies.

It should teach us, amidst what seem to us disorders and irregularities in the course of events, to lay aside the apprehension, that the purposes of heaven are going to be defeated. As nothing can take place unexpectedly to infinite knowledge and foresight, we may rest assured, that nothing can frustrate the designs of infinite goodness and rectitude.

It should teach us a pious confidence and cheerful trust in Divine Providence. That nothing can take place to disappoint the Author of nature and discon-

cert his plans ; that all is foreseen and provided for, is our security of the order and stability of Providence, and should inspire us with cheerfulness and hope.

It should, finally, teach us a humble sense of ourselves, of our impotence, and our dependence. Do we vainly think to lay out and accomplish our own purposes ? and to do it in defiance of heaven and in the violation of its laws ? Whatever we do, as well when we violate as when we obey the laws of our Maker, we are accomplishing some part of the great scheme of his government ; and his great and good designs he will as certainly effect by our misconduct and its punishment, as by our obedience and its attendant rewards.

And let us remember of what infinite moment it is, that the will of God be executed by us, as its willing instruments, rather than executed upon us as its refractory and reluctant subjects.

CHAPTER XI.

WISDOM.

WHEN the wisdom of God is spoken of, something is meant distinct from knowledge. The one relates to the perception of truth, the other to the use of it. The one is chiefly a passive, the other wholly an active quality. By the knowledge of God we mean his perfect acquaintance with everything that is, and that takes place, and his understanding of the nature, condition, qualities, and actions of all beings;—by his wisdom we express the skill with which the whole scheme of things was contrived, and everything was made to be what it is. We have found reason to believe that the knowledge of God is perfect; a careful inspection of any part of his works will leave us no room to doubt the perfection of his wisdom.

In pursuing this subject for the purpose of ascertaining what reason teaches, our difficulty is, not in finding sufficient proofs of wisdom, but in selecting them from an inexhaustible fund and boundless variety of proofs and illustrations, equally striking, and equally obvious.

I shall for distinctness confine myself to a single view of the subject, considering the wisdom of God as displayed in the choice of means to accomplish ends. The preference of those ends which are cho-

sen, to others, which may be imagined, belongs to another attribute of an entirely different kind. The purposes of God are of a moral nature, and are dictated by a moral attribute, his benevolence. The contrivances for executing those purposes, and accomplishing the designs of goodness, furnish the peculiar proof of the attribute of wisdom.

In examining any work of art, after ascertaining its use and design, our opinion of the skill of the artist and our admiration of his talents depend on finding an exact adaptation of means to accomplish the end proposed.

The visible creation is a vast system comprising innumerable objects, and a great number and variety of ends, principal and subordinate, to be provided for. In the form and distribution of parts, in the relations they bear to each other, in the principles and laws by which they are united, and by which they act on each other, there is much room for wise and skilful management.

We see it, and cannot fail to admire it, in that single power extending and operating, as far as we know, throughout the whole material universe, producing the same effects and answering the same purposes everywhere, operating on all bodies, binding together the near, and connecting the distant; holding planets in their orbits, and regulating their motions, and at the same time by the same law regulating the fall of a pebble on their surface, or a feather floating in their atmosphere, subjecting the whole material world in all its parts to one uniform law. We

see it in the provision for diffusing light and heat in their due proportions for necessary uses through the system ; — the same central body being constructed to answer the threefold purpose of balancing the whole and governing the motion of all the parts by its magnitude and gravity, of giving light to the whole, and with it communicating that heat, which is essential to animal and vegetable life.

We see it in the form and the double motions of the planetary bodies, especially of that planet on which we are placed, so adjusted as to expose all the parts of its surface successively to the action of the great luminary, from which it receives motion, and light, and heat ; by which, while producing the most grateful vicissitudes, these influences are in a measure equalized, yet not so as to rob them of the charms and advantages of that variety, which the different regions of the earth present. We see it again in the physical and moral purposes which are accomplished by this variety ; in the aspect and productions of the several regions of the globe ; in the variety of occupation and character, means of improvement and sources of support and comfort they severally furnish ; especially in that intercourse of each with every other part of the world, which is thus induced, necessary to give to each the productions of all ; multiplying thus, by a mutual interchange of what is peculiar to each, the comforts of all ; exciting to the activity and enterprise, for which, without it, there would be no scope or no sufficient motive ; which activity and enterprise contrib-

ute so much to give vigor and elevation to the faculties, and to improve the intellectual and moral state of the world. In this, as in many other instances, we discover, — what we admire as singular marks of wisdom, when they appear in the works of men, — several purposes, one beyond another, accomplished by the same means, and rising one above another in value and importance. We find a physical constitution not limited in its design to its immediate natural effects, but looking forward to further results, and terminating in distant and important consequences in the social relations and the intellectual and moral system.

When from the structure of the whole system of nature, and the fundamental principles and laws that prevail in it, we descend to the parts, the discoveries of divine wisdom will not be less numerous and convincing. In the globe which we inhabit, when we consider it as designed for the dwelling of the various orders of living creatures which we find inhabiting it, and filling the earth, the water, and the air; what can be imagined more admirable than the general structure and the distribution of the elements of which it is composed? The land disposed into countries various in their forms and dimensions, rising into hills and sinking in valleys, separated by seas, indented with bays, intersected by rivers, from which it is constantly supplied with moisture and rendered fruitful, by means of exhalations conveyed to it through an all-surrounding atmosphere? By which means the innumerable tribes of living creatures find in the ele-

ments to which they belong, and the regions to which they are destined, provisions suited to their natures and wants. The further we push our inquiries, and the more perfect knowledge we acquire of the order, constitution, and properties of things, the more do we see of wisdom in design and skill in execution. Apparent difficulties are removed. Parts which seemed useless are found to answer valuable purposes. And beauty and usefulness are discovered, where at first we saw only deformity and waste. The shapeless rock we find destined to be applied by human industry and ingenuity to purposes of ornament and use. The barren mountain supplies a retreat and shelter for the wild beast and fowls of heaven. The dreary waste becomes, under the hand of cultivation, a fruitful field, or rises a populous city. The ocean, which seems to cover so disproportioned a part of our globe, is required to furnish sufficient supplies of rain for the earth,—it becomes also a convenient highway for intercourse between distant lands, nor is it barren of life, perception, and enjoyment. Countless myriads sport in its depths, and it supplies a large proportion of the food that supports the inhabitants of the earth and air.

Are there circumstances in the operations of nature which seem to be exceptions to the character of the general plan, apparently adverse and defeating the purposes of wisdom? There are very few which are not already, and none probably which will not sometime hereafter, be found either resolvable into general laws, which are on the whole salutary, or answering some useful purpose, for which there is no

other provision. Or the effect, which we view as an evil or a deformity, may be actually a necessary and important part of the general system. The fire that we apply to so many important uses, is a wise and necessary provision, notwithstanding its occasional destructive effects, in laying waste our dwellings, and consuming our property.

The tornado that uproots a forest, and the lightening and tempest that overwhelm a fleet, have at the same time perhaps prevented a pestilence. And the pestilence itself, which, unprevented, spreads desolation through a country, and carries with it dismay and terror, serves also to rouse to reflection, and reclaim to sobriety and virtue, a thoughtless and profligate race. So that the very things, which with partial and imperfect views we considered as blemishes in the works of God, and obstacles in the way of his designs, we find to be the instruments he is employing, and the best he could employ to accomplish them.

We may come down to minuter views, and consider the provisions which appear for single and particular purposes, and the wisdom of the contrivances will appear in their exact adaptation to the end for which they were designed. Provisions of this kind are to be seen in the whole animal economy. It is to be remarked in the structure and functions, which are common to all that possess animal life; in the principle, whatever it be, on which vitality itself depends; in the several organs and functions, by which that principle is preserved; in the power and the instruments of voluntary motion; in the organs of sense,

and particularly in the mechanism, by which those functions on which the continuance of life depends, such as respiration and the circulation of the blood, are constantly carried on by a spontaneous action, without the effort, and even without the knowledge of the being itself.

The wisdom and the value of this last provision ought not to be overlooked. And it ought to fill us at once with admiration and with gratitude. The living being is thus relieved from the care of a constant immediate attention to the continuance of its life, by an operation which goes on with as much safety and perfection when it sleeps as when it wakes, and which is neither impeded nor interrupted when its care and attention are wholly directed to other objects.

What wise contrivance and exact adaptation do we discover, when we examine the peculiar organization and structure of the several kinds of beings that have animal life, and consider them in connexion with the state of life for which they were intended, and particularly the element in which they were to live. So exactly are the tribes that inhabit the earth, the air, and the water, suited each in his nature, formation, and wants, to his respective element, that while he there enjoys his existence, any change would be fatal to him! How admirably is each provided with the means of obtaining and using the food that is adapted to its nature! However profuse were the supply which nature furnishes, it were useless without a suitable organization to receive and make use of it. The

horse or the sheep would famish in the finest pasture, had they only the sharp-pointed teeth of the cat or the lion, and these in turn must perish, were they armed only with the clumsy hoof, and blunt grinders of the former. The eagle and the shark are both formed to live on prey, but of different kinds and in different elements, and each of them would perish before he could supply himself with the food, that belongs to the other.

But the most remarkable demonstrations of the divine wisdom we meet with in our own frame and constitution. We are struck with admiration, when we reflect what a vast number and variety of purposes were to be provided for, and within how small a case the machinery is enclosed, that is to accomplish them all; what an infinity of operations are continually going on, the most delicate, the most elaborate, some of them the most incomprehensible, by a mechanism that can be crowded within so narrow a compass! If we think of the uses of the several parts of the human body, we are struck with admiration at the exactness and perfection with which they are adapted to them. Considered as sentient beings, we have five distinct inlets to the perception of external objects. For four of them, sight, hearing, smell, and taste, we have for each a separate, distinct organ; for the other, feeling, we have an organization diffused over the whole body. For this arrangement the best reasons may be assigned, and its wisdom can in no way be made so clear, as by considering the case as reversed,—that feeling were confined

to a single part, and the whole body an eye or an ear. In the use and design of the latter sense, feeling, we perceive why it should be placed alike in every part of the body. The purposes of the other are sufficiently answered by a single organ, or by two, as is the case with two of them. And we find them placed in the neighborhood of each other, in the most elevated part, and distributed in the most convenient manner, in their relation to one another, to the rest of the body, and to their respective uses. A change could not be made in their relative position, nor the whole be removed to another part of the body, without evident injury.

Being designed not to be fixed like a tree or vegetable to one spot, but to move from place to place, we are furnished with organs for this purpose, in their form and structure of wonderful workmanship, and adapted to carry the body by a motion the most easy, and steady, and, what is material to remark, in the most convenient direction. This is immediately felt by imagining how it would be, if the feet were constructed to carry the body in a direction opposite to that to which the eyes were directed, so that we should always be walking in the dark, and looking behind us instead of forward.

We can indeed fancy a more perfect method of moving from place to place, and a different machinery for the purpose. We might have been constructed, for instance, with wings to fly like the birds. But besides that the question is not, whether our manner of moving and the provision for it is the most perfect that can

be imagined, it is extremely uncertain, whether any other method would better answer all the purposes of just such beings as we are in every other respect.

The arms and hands are another part of our frame, which cannot be steadily contemplated without admiration of the wisdom in their structure and uses. Who that considers how they are framed for strength and activity, of what variety and rapidity of motion they are capable, and in what an endless diversity of labor they may be employed, can fail to be struck with their wonderful adaptation to all the uses for which they were designed, and to all the purposes for which they are needed ! Who has ever, in his sober senses, felt it a desirable thing, that, in any part of their structure, their position, or the direction of their motions, they were different from what they are ! Who has ever seen them exercised in the various labors of the husbandman or the mechanic, or employed in directing the motion of the pen, or in touching the strings of a musical instrument, without giving involuntary utterance to the exclamation, — “ how wonderfully made, how curiously wrought, how exquisitely contrived ! ”

Again, man was designed for a social being, and for that purpose was necessary the power of speech. How wonderful is the whole apparatus by which that work is carried on ! The instrument by which the voice is formed, capable of such variety of tones, and obedient to the will in passing with such ease and rapidity through every different inflection and modulation ! The little member, which does the work of

articulation, with what astonishing quickness and precision is it made to mark the minute and scarcely perceptible distinction between an infinite number of articulate sounds! For the purpose of communicating our thoughts to each other, could a contrivance be better imagined than that of speech? Could an organization for its execution be conceived more happy, and simple, and perfect, than that, which the divine wisdom has seen fit to adopt?

I have directed attention for the illustration of my subject to a very few out of many of the manifestations of the divine wisdom, that meet us in the visible creation. I have confined myself, too, to the most obvious circumstances, the mere outside of things. A closer investigation, and pursuit of our inquiries into the minuter and internal parts of the constitution, structure, and offices of ourselves and the bodies about us, would bring us still stronger conviction, that he who formed them must be "wise in heart," and open to us fuller and more admiring views of the display of his wisdom in the execution of his purposes.

But to pursue these views more in detail would carry me beyond the limits suitable to be prescribed to this part of the subject. The instances I have brought are sufficient to show the nature of the argument, though they will give but a very faint notion of the extent to which it may be carried. We should find in the form and position of each bone and joint in the human or the animal frame, and in the structure, composition, design, and uses of each vessel and

fibre of every animal and every vegetable, a new theme for admiring contemplation of the wisdom of him, who contrived and put together these wonderful pieces of living mechanism.

These speculations, as far as they have led us, and as far as we may follow them up in our retired contemplations, will not have answered their purpose by having merely passed through our minds. They should terminate, not in the immediate object of our contemplation, the wonders of the creation, but conduct us up through them to the more wonderful skill of the Creator.

CHAPTER XII.

POWER.

ON scarcely any subject can we pursue our inquiries in such a manner, as not to find ourselves under the necessity of taking for granted, or supposing, in one part of the argument, what is afterward to be proved. This is unwarrantable only, when the truth of what is thus assumed is to be supported in whole or in part by the proposition which it is brought to prove. Where the truth of that which is assumed is independent of that which it is brought to prove, or where it does not make a part of the argument, but is asserted as a connected fact or truth, or one from which the argument is to proceed, it is allowable, and the force of the reasoning is not weakened. Something of this latter kind is perceived in treating the subject on which I am now engaged. The attributes of God are intimately connected together. Neither of them can be properly said to be first or last, to be prior or posterior to another. And it is not easy to treat of any one of them, without having occasion to speak of the others. Some order, however, is necessary to be adopted; and that which I have chosen, of beginning with the natural perfections, and then proceeding to those of a moral nature, seems to be a proper and obvious one. Yet I have

already, more than once, had occasion, in treating of the natural perfections, to bring into view one of the moral attributes ; and I must now again mention the same attribute, Goodness, as standing, in one point of view, before that which is to be the subject of this chapter, Power, as well as before that of the preceding, Wisdom. It is when we view them through, and as they stand connected with, the divine purposes, that this arrangement presents itself. Those purposes we say were suggested by goodness. Wisdom was concerned in the contrivance and choice of means for their execution. Their execution itself was the work of power.

In another view of the subject, however, Power is the first of the divine attributes, that comes under our cognizance. It even precedes the knowledge of his being. It is that which first suggests to us the existence of God. We see effects, which demand a cause ; a creation, which must have had a creator. It was the exertion of power, which first led to inquire for the being in whom it resided, and by whom it was exerted.

It is after being led up through the medium of his perfections, and particularly of his power, to the knowledge of his being, that we afterwards come back again to examine into the nature and extent of each of those perfections.

With respect to the nature of the divine power, and the manner of its exertion, reason has left us entirely in the dark ; nor has revelation shed a single ray of light on the subject. It is probably a subject,

which we have not faculties to comprehend. Certain it is, that whenever we attempt it, we are lost and bewildered.

In finite beings, power is of all qualities the most difficult to define or explain. In the infinite being, underived and unlimited, and exerted without the instrumentality of intermediate causes, it is still further removed from the range of our conceptions. All the exercise of power which we see, or of which we are conscious in ourselves, is mediate; the agency is not direct; that of the first cause must be direct and immediate. The very idea of a first cause implies something prior to all other causes, as well as effects. It implies therefore the exertion of power previous to the existence of instruments and means. It implies indeed the greatest of all acts of power—creation.

We must admit, however difficult we may find it to have any clear conception of it, a power which has given being to everything that exists, the self-existent being only excepted. This power then must have been exerted before anything else did exist. To the same power also we must refer all the properties of everything, and the powers of every agent throughout the universe. These are both exercises of power, which we cannot deny to the Author of nature, and which can belong to no created being. We cannot deny them to the Author of nature, because they are the very basis of the argument by which we are brought to the acknowledgment of his being.

But if it is by the power of God, that all things at

first exist, it must be his power that sustains them ; if it was he that imparted their characteristic properties, it is he also that continues them. And if all beings, and all power in created things, be derived from him, and dependent on him, there would seem to be nothing that should suggest to us any limits of the divine power, nothing that should lead us to doubt of its being, in the most perfect sense, infinite.

I say there is nothing to suggest any limits, or a doubt of its being infinite. There can be no rival power to counteract, or contrary power to control that, which, by the supposition, and by every argument that proves its existence, is the source of all other power. Whether there be any positive ground for believing and asserting that it is absolutely infinite, will depend, in the first place, on what is to be understood by infinite or almighty power, and in the next place, on the actual manifestations of the divine power in the creation and government of the universe.

As to the first, — what is to be understood by infinite or almighty power, — it should be observed, that it must mean something more, than that which is merely unrestrained ; which has no superior force to control its exercise, or to limit its effects. We can imagine a finite power, which, being perfectly at liberty to act to its full extent, and with nothing without to control or counteract it, shall yet be capable of producing only certain kinds of effects, and to a certain degree. By almighty power we mean that, which can produce every kind of effect in every

possible degree. It is that which is neither controlled by any superior power, nor limited by any deficiency in itself. Finite powers are limited in both of these ways, — infinite in neither.

It is not however to be understood, that nothing is impossible to almighty power. There are impossibilities in the nature of things, which no power can overcome, and which it is no derogation from the power of the Almighty to say, that even that power cannot perform. We do not deny almighty power to God, when we deny him the power of working an absolute impossibility. Propositions, implying absolute contradiction, are natural impossibilities ; and the wildest absurdity follows from asserting them, as some from the best motives, and others from the worst, have done, to be the objects of omnipotence, — claiming as the prerogative of almighty power, that of doing what is not an object of power.

It may be proper, however, to observe, that this is distinct from the question respecting the power to perform a miracle. A supernatural event admits of a clear distinction from an impossible one. A miracle has relation, not to the nature of things, but to an established course of nature, which course of nature the power, which first established, may at any time suspend, or alter, or violate. No one, who believes that God appointed the motions of the heavenly bodies, can doubt his power to suspend or alter them.

In the actual exercise of the divine power there may also be restrictions of a moral nature ; but those have nothing to do with the present question. That

the justice or goodness or mercy of God will not allow of his willing a thing, has no bearing on the question that respects his physical power to perform it.

But we get our direct notion of the power of God, and our clearest views of its greatness and extent, by contemplating the manifestations of it in the creation and government of the world.

Let us then consider the power of God as executing what his wisdom had first planned.

We may begin with ourselves, our own being, structure, and faculties, and thence pass to the objects around us, and the worlds above us. Our bodies with the power of motion, and the organs of sense, and our minds with the powers of thought, perception, and will, have recently sprung into being. Now admitting that the substance of which the material part is composed existed before, in a different form and different combinations, the properties and powers it now possesses did not, and they are equivalent to a new creation; and besides the same cannot be said of the mind, or thinking faculty. Of this we have no proof, and no ground for believing, that the substance itself had any being till the first moment of our consciousness. For we cannot, as in the case of our bodies, trace back the mind to a different, previous state of being, in a different form, and with other properties and powers. The mind is not, like the body, compounded of parts. It is single, simple, indivisible, as is the consciousness we have of its being and activity. — We have then, in ourselves, and in each human being

that is born into the world, an instance of the exercise of creative power, an instance of the highest kind and degree of power, of which we can have any conception. The power of consciousness had recently a beginning. Now this power is the only evidence there can be of the existence of the mind in which it dwells. Before it existed then, the being itself, as far as we can know, did not exist. The observation may be transferred with nearly the same force to every animal, and perhaps we may add to every vegetable production. In every tree and every plant that springs up from the ground, we witness the exertion of a power, that can hardly be distinguished from that of creation. In forming the organs of the human body, which are to serve for the reception of the intellectual principle and its instruments; the various vessels of the animal frame, which are to carry on its circulations necessary to the production and continuance of animal life; and the fibres of plants and the juices, which fit them for life and growth;—in the whole and each of them, nothing more may be required, than a new and peculiar arrangement of matter, which already existed in other forms. But the superaddition of the principle of *life*, even in its lowest state, vegetable life, is quite another thing. Here is something, which did not before exist in any form. There is one added to the number of beings that before existed. This we readily perceive when we carry the mind back to the first animal or the first vegetable of the kind that was brought into being. It is only because we are accustomed to a different

view of the subject, that it is not as instantly perceived with respect to every subsequent individual life.

What then must be our conception of that power which is thus every moment operating, in bringing into life the countless multitudes of beings that fill the portion of space about us ; that prepares for each life an organization or a vehicle peculiar and suited to its nature and destination ; that prepares for it the abode and the sustenance it requires ; and that adds to the gift of life the powers of perception and motion, of thought, enjoyment, and suffering. What enlargement of our conception of the Creator's power do we experience as we stretch our views further, as we think of the extent of the creation ; when we think what a mere speck on our own globe it is, that falls under our direct personal observation ; what a mere atom the globe itself is, when compared with the system of which it is a part ; and that this whole system is but a point in the universe, and if blotted out of being would scarcely be missed by an eye that takes in the whole ; and then reflect, that this same power is operating at the same time in every part of the wide creation in similar or in other productions !

Improvement in science, and discoveries in the knowledge of nature, have opened to us other views of the wonderful power of the Former of all things. With what admiration are we struck, when we reflect on the very small number of elements, the few earths, salts, metals, and gases, of which all material substances are composed, and into which they may be resolved. How are we struck with surprise, when we

think that the fairest human form consists of the same elements, scarcely differing in their several proportions, and only varying in the manner of their combination, from those that constitute the ugliest beast or the most loathsome reptile ! That the tree which grows in the pasture, the grass that springs up at its root, the bird that sings in its branches, and the lamb that sports in its shade, are all made of the same materials, and, when reduced to their respective elements, scarcely vary from each other even in the proportion of the several elements into which they are respectively resolved. How shall we think or speak of that power which has thus, from a small number of original elements, produced all that we see in the endless variety of form and of properties in the objects of nature ! How shall we especially conceive of that power which first gave existence to these elements themselves, and made them capable of such an infinite variety of form, proportion, and mutual relation, and of properties and powers for all the purposes and uses to which they are applied !

Again, there are some of the objects and phenomena of nature, which impress us in a more lively manner than others, with images of the divine power. Whatever is great or terrible in nature reminds us of the power of the Lord of nature. Such are the high mountain or rock overhanging its base, or the impetuous rushing of the cataract. We can hardly behold them without trembling with awe at the hand that formed and guides them. A more than usual impression of the mighty power of God is felt in the

hurricane, the tempest, or the torrent that sweeps along with it whatever is in its way. It is felt in contemplating the rivers of liquid fire that pour out with resistless force from the crater of the volcano. It is felt in the lightning, and the tremendous voice that utters itself in thunders. In the earthquake that makes the whole fabric of our globe to tremble, — it fills us with dread and dismay.

But if such be the impression from these phenomena, what will it, what ought it to be, when we rise to higher contemplation, and extend our thoughts to other indications of greatness and strength ; — when we think of this globe itself, impelled with a rapidity that outstrips the motion of thought, through the regions of space, yet guided with unerring exactness, and kept within its appointed bounds ; — the other planets also with their secondaries moved and directed by the same hand ; — the sun suspended in the centre of the system, and the comets travelling off for centuries with a motion far exceeding the quickness of sound, without getting beyond the sphere of his attraction, or falling within that of other systems, and returning again by the same power that sent them abroad ! What will it be, when we suffer imagination to escape beyond the limits of a comet's path, and to see on every side and in every direction, other suns and other systems, above, beneath, and beyond each other, without number and without end, all subject to one law, balanced by the same power, held at their appointed distances, and kept in perpetual safety and uninterrupted harmony !

It must be a single power, guided by a single understanding and will, that can preserve these vast bodies in rapid motion and in various directions from losing the balance that keeps them in their places, and rushing into confusion and ruin. And the single power that does this, shall we hesitate to pronounce infinite? Can imagination assign to it limits, or say that anything is too great for it?

The sentiments which this attribute is calculated to inspire are fear and trust. Did we know nothing of God but his power, fear would be the prevailing sentiment. And in those whose contemplations are chiefly directed to this attribute, religion, instead of being a solace and a source of hope, and confidence, and joy, becomes an occasion of terror and dread. But when to the almighty power of God we join the consideration of his parental character, and think that it is never exercised in an arbitrary manner, but always directed by wisdom and benignity, it becomes the foundation of a cheerful confidence and settled trust. We cannot fail to feel ourselves safe in his hands, assured that there is no rival or opposite being of superior power, that can defeat his purposes by keeping from us the good he has designed, or by bringing upon us evils contrary to his will. And if in our further inquiries it shall appear, that his will is always directed by a goodness, as infinite as his power, it will teach us how reasonable it is, whatever be the course of events, to take refuge under the shadow of his wing, and fear no evil, and to rejoice that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

CHAPTER XIII.

SPIRITUALITY.

THE Being to whom, in following the light of reason, we have been led to ascribe almighty power, infinite wisdom, and perfect knowledge of all things, is also declared to be a Spirit.

We speak of spirit as distinguished from body. It is that which is incorporeal, invisible, not an object of any of our senses. So far, however, the definition is merely negative. But the term is used to express something positive and real. However defective our conceptions on the subject may be, we always understand by it a being, and therefore a substance, which is not material, not solid and impenetrable, not composed of parts like body, yet living, active, conscious, capable of thought, design, affection, and will. These are accordingly the ideas that are suggested to our minds when it is said that God is a Spirit.

But though this is our notion of spirit, we find it not easy to separate from any being all material qualities. We are ourselves so intimately connected with the material world, and receive all our knowledge through the medium of the senses, that we find it difficult to conceive of a pure unembodied existence.

Accordingly, gross conceptions of God have prevailed with the ignorant and unenlightened in all ages,

and even the well informed have hardly been able to drive them away. Sensible qualities and bodily parts have been attributed to him, and a local residence assigned him. This has happened in part from an unavoidable defect in human language. So entirely is our language borrowed from the objects of sense, that when we have occasion to speak of the qualities and actions of a spiritual being, we are obliged to do it in terms derived from these, and *metaphorically* applied. So that where the notions of God are the most correct, the language is still for this cause imperfect. And this imperfection of human language becomes the occasion of erroneous and imperfect conceptions, even where the true doctrine of God has been taught by revelation.

For instance, deriving all our knowledge through the medium of the senses, particularly those of sight and hearing, and having no conception of the manner in which ideas can be received by a being destitute of bodily organs, we are under the necessity, in speaking of the divine knowledge, to use that language which is thus familiar to us. We say that God sees and hears all things, that his eyes are upon us, and his ears open; when we only mean that he has perfect knowledge of all things, and whatever takes place, without intending to express the manner of his knowledge. We say that he has a strong arm, that he stretches forth his hand, when we would express the exertion of his power to accomplish any of his purposes, without being conscious that we make use of language wholly inapplicable to him in its literal

sense. So also do we speak of the face of God, as a visible object, of his voice, of his speaking to men, at the same time that we confess that he is invisible, "that no man hath at any time heard his voice, or seen his shape." The consequence is, that however pure and correct our speculative faith, our conceptions are apt to be extremely gross. The language we are under the necessity of using proves more effectual to debase our conceptions and fill the mind with low and unworthy images, than our speculative reasoning to elevate and refine them.

Further, in all our experience and observation of spiritual existences we see them only connected with material bodies. This is the case with all living agents. It is the case also with all active powers. None exist, to our knowledge, in a separate state, and hold their being and activity independent of matter. The human intellect, for instance, is joined to an organized body. So also the powers of gravity, electricity, magnetism, appear to us only in union with matter. This is another circumstance that serves to prevent our so easily bringing the mind to conceive of God, as a pure, unembodied Spirit, and occasions a closer connexion, — a connexion not easily dissolved, — between our conceptions of God and the language we are obliged to make use of in expressing them.

Yet there are considerations which ought to overcome these prejudices, and not only to satisfy the demands of our faith, but also to conquer the reluctance of the imagination.

In the first place, there is no other supposition

which does not require a greater effort both of faith and imagination. The only alternative, except Atheism, is to adopt the notion of a material God. But this is negated by all that we have seen of the attributes of God, to which nothing that we know of matter has any resemblance. The material world, the visible universe, is evidently an effect; what we seek for is a cause; and it is essential to the idea of God, that he be the cause of all things. The known properties of matter are passive. It possesses no principle of activity. It is essentially inert; possesses not even the power of self-motion. The Creator and Governor of the Universe is essentially active, and is perpetually communicating motion, and actuating all things. Are there properties belonging to some portions of matter, such as electricity and magnetism, which seem to be exceptions, and to indicate an internal principle of activity? Yet these are partial and limited. And besides, were they universal, like gravity, like that also they act without choice, without freedom, without design; by laws imposed upon them, of which they are ignorant, and producing effects of which the bodies in which they reside are wholly unconscious. But it has been shown, and we can hardly open our eyes without receiving new and stronger conviction of the fact, that the whole arrangement of the system of the universe, the structure and disposition of all its parts, especially the whole economy of organized matter, indicate design, display wisdom, contrivance, suiting of means

employed to ends proposed, adapting a method of operation to purposes to be effected.

Is there any other power or principle inherent in matter more universal, more subtle, more active, and the activity of which bids fairer to solve the great problem, and account for the existence of the universe, and all the physical and intellectual phenomena it presents? Will it be said, with the ancient Magians, that fire is this principle, seeing it pervades all bodies, and is so necessary and powerful an agent in most of the phenomena of nature, and particularly in the production and continuance of vegetable and animal life? It may be replied, that this, like all other material agents, is manifestly unconscious, undesigning, producing effects, of which it has no knowledge, by laws imposed on it by a superior power; itself pervaded by a power, which can arrest and bind it, or direct all its motions. Like all other forms of matter, too, this lies under the reasonable suspicion of being essentially inert. Why else is it latent in the flint, and there forever remains, unless by an external stroke elicited from its confinement?

Again, can the creature be imagined to be of a superior order of being to the Creator; the thing formed, to him that formed it; the production nobler than the producing power? But will it be pretended, that the material world is of a nobler nature, than the intellectual? that mind with all its powers is not superior to body with all its properties? Will it be thought as probable that the latter should have brought forth the former, as that the former should

have contrived the latter ; that intelligence should be the offspring of solidity, and form, and color, and attraction, and heat, as that those should be the invention of intelligence ?

The necessity then of adopting a less probable alternative, if you reject the doctrine of a spiritual, incorporeal substance, is with good reason alleged as one of the arguments to reconcile the imagination to it, and to prepare the mind to listen to any considerations, which are thought to favor it. It should also lead us to suspect that the difficulty, which prevents its reception on the ground of incredibility, may be imaginary, and not founded in anything real.

We proceed to one further consideration. It is, that the whole objection to an immaterial substance is founded on a mistaken notion as to the clearness of our conception of a material substance. We are imposed upon by our senses, and led into the apprehension, that we have a clearer notion of matter than of spirit, when in fact we are equally ignorant of both, and know nothing of either but their properties and powers. These properties and powers are as distinct from each other, and as clearly defined, as can be imagined. To the one belong extension, solidity, the power of being moved, and of affecting some of our senses ; to the other, thought, will, and the power of causing motion. Of the substance or being, to which either of these belong, we know nothing else except its properties. But that they are entirely distinct is rendered credible, when we consider, that if you take away all the properties of

mind, matter will remain unimpaired ; on the other hand, remove all the properties of matter, and mind may be conceived still to remain. We have therefore the same evidence, and equal reason to believe, that mind is independent of matter, and may exist without it, on the one hand, as we have, on the other, that matter is independent of mind, and may exist in a state of separation from it. The latter we see in the whole mass of lifeless, unanimated, unconscious matter, which composes the material universe ; that we see not the former, in the same manner, is by no means conclusive against it, since from the nature of the case, it is not possible it should be so. The very notion of an immaterial being is, that it is not cognizable by any of our senses.

But we have that, which should not be less satisfactory to our minds, than a sensible demonstration. That there is a God, the author of all things, and governor of the world, we have proof of the highest and most satisfactory kind. That he possesses in the highest possible perfection all the attributes of mind, we have the same evidence, that we have of his being. But there is nothing that should lead us to the apprehension, that he has any one of the properties of body, and much that seems to be positively inconsistent with the supposition of it. He is invisible ; He is the object of none of our senses. Yet we know, “ that he is never far from any one of us,” and are not less assured by reason, than by revelation, that “ in him we live, and move, and have our being.”

CHAPTER XIV.

GOODNESS.

RELIGION is founded on the relation of man to his Maker. Its character will accordingly depend on the character ascribed to him, on the attributes that are supposed to belong to him. We may use ourselves to contemplate him only in the exhibitions of his power, and the displays of his knowledge and skill, and if we do so, it will be likely to inspire us with more of terror and dread, than of confidence, and hope, and love; and our religion will partake too much of austerity and gloom. If, on the other hand, we are accustomed to think of his power as always directed by goodness, to see him in acts of beneficence, providing blessings for his creatures, and doing them good; our religion will have more of cheerfulness, and gratitude, and affection, and hope. Revelation assures us, that the Being, who made the world and all its inhabitants, is a kind and benevolent being. It represents him as a father and friend to his creation. It declares that "he is good to all, that his tender mercies are over all his works."

Let us inquire what are the evidences we have, that such is the character of the Author of nature; what proofs are presented to us, in what we see of his works, of kind intention and benevolent purpose.

It is not with the attribute of Goodness, as it is with some of the other attributes of God, that the proofs of it are the same as the proofs of his being. Wisdom and power are displayed in all the works of God ; and to perceive it, we have only to view them in that single light, in which they indicate an intelligent, active, designing cause. But the same view will not alone prove anything respecting his Goodness. For power may be exerted in producing evil, as well as good. And the cause of misery may be intelligent. As much intelligence and skill may be displayed in contriving the means for executing the most malignant, as the most benevolent purposes.

Now the end, which Goodness proposes to itself is happiness, and happiness only. The sensible proofs therefore of the goodness of the Author of nature are just equal to the evidence we have of a tendency in his works to the production of happiness. The one is the exact measure of the other. Our opinion then on the subject will be regulated by what we can discover of kind intention in provisions made for the happiness of sentient and intelligent beings ; — such only being capable of happiness.

We direct our attention, then, to a general view of the creation, and in the greatness of the material universe, the disposition of its parts, the preservation of its order, the regularity of its motions, and the grandeur and beauty it everywhere displays, we perceive decisive proofs of wisdom in contrivance and power in execution in the Author of nature, above our highest conception. But so far there may be no certain

indications of goodness, nothing that obliges us to think that the Author of all this grandeur and order and beauty is a benevolent being. For what were the use of the best constructed mansion, without an occupant? What the most beautiful scenery, were there no eye to behold it, no mind to perceive its charms, no heart to enjoy its delights? It is not then till we contemplate the material universe as an abode for the beings which inhabit or behold it, that we can see in it proofs of the beneficence of its Maker. Further, is it sufficient that it be merely peopled with inhabitants? A structure, which displays the most exquisite skill of the artist, may yet be but a prison to its occupant, the abode of wretchedness and despair. A world also, in which are the richest displays of beauty, and order, and magnificence, may be filled with inhabitants, that have no perception of its grandeur, and no relish for its beauty, or who regard it as a place of exile from which they are impatient to make their escape.

To ascertain then how far the divine character, and divine scheme of government are that of beneficence, we are to direct our attention only to living beings, their condition, and the provisions made for them.

In the first place, then, the world which we inhabit,—and by analogy we have reason to believe the whole universe,—is filled with sensitive and intellectual life; there is no portion of it, that is not either itself inhabited by creatures endued with such powers of perception, either of sense or of intellect,

as qualify them to receive pleasure from their being, and derive enjoyment from the exercise of their faculties, or that does not contribute some important benefits to other portions that are so inhabited. Not a few beings only thus live under the smiles of their Maker, and enjoy his munificence and care, but countless multitudes, and a perpetual succession of them ; by various organization suited to different elements ; by their constitution adapted to different regions, and formed for different kinds and degrees of happiness. Not a single species, or a few kinds only are scattered thinly over the wide universe. Innumerable orders of them appear, rising up to man from the lowest degree of animal nature. So that in the gradation of being, as well as in the space it occupies, no vacancy is found, no interstices remain unfilled. And of all these creatures, not one order or one individual being left without the visible tokens of its maker's care and kind regards, can it be any more doubted by the pupil of nature, than by the disciple of revelation, whether He, who has thus peopled his creation, and thus provided for his creatures, is a friend or an enemy to the works of his hands ? If such a doubt can for a moment arise, let him cast an eye over the earth, the air, and the sea, all teeming with life in various forms, all full of perpetual activity, and cheerfulness, and joy ; and his doubts will vanish. Let him behold the hosts of animated forms, that walk on the surface, or have their abode in the bosom of the earth ; the countless multitudes that frolic in the atmosphere, and in perpetual music ex-

press their joys ; and the myriads that sport beneath the wave, and in their ceaseless gambols proclaim how they enjoy their being.

In all these varieties of animal existence, what do we find ? not only life given and preserved, but an evident care to make that life a blessing. We discover a studied attention to adapt the organization of each to the element it is intended to occupy, and the manner of life to which it is destined ; to suit its nature to the objects with which it is surrounded ; to accommodate the things about it to its necessities ; to furnish a supply to its wants ; and, what is deserving of peculiar notice, to give it the capacity of receiving pleasure from the constant and ordinary functions of life, and from the most common objects. This has been often remarked, and I know not a circumstance more striking than this, and more decisive to show the goodness of the great Creator. We see the wisdom of the Creator admirably displayed in the manner in which animal life is sustained. The process is long, intricate, and circuitous, and what is remarkable is, that in each stage it is usually accompanied with agreeable sensations. This, it has been well observed, can only be resolved into the benevolence of the Deity ; since every other purpose, except that of happiness, might have been as well attained without as with this kind provision.

When we thus see, that, through the whole world of sensitive beings, animal life is not enlivened occasionally and incidentally only by the pleasures that flow from the gratification of appetite ; but that in

the constant employment of life and its necessary functions, they are supplied with a constant succession of grateful sensations, can we doubt the beneficence that has so formed our constitution and so adjusted our condition?

Contrivance and design appearing in the works of creation, a uniform adaptation of means to ends there discovered, are considered as furnishing decisive proof of an intelligent author of nature. Now if it can be made to appear, that goodness is the characteristic of every contrivance, and its intention and its tendency be evidently the production or communication of happiness, the argument may be extended, and the goodness as well as the intelligence of the great Creator be supported.

Let us see in a few instances how the argument may be applied.

In the structure of the universe we see throughout an arrangement, which has evidently the good of the living beings that inhabit all worlds for its object. The benefits we feel ourselves, we may presume are felt through the planetary system by the light and heat emitted from the central sun, to enlighten, and warm, and cheer the globes that move around him. Can we doubt whether the intention was kind as far as respects our own earth, though in the several regions of it the distribution is extremely unequal? Though by a peculiar obliquity of its rotation, some portions of it, scorched by his vertical rays, are blasted with perpetual sterility, while others scarcely feel at all his enlivening influence, are half their time

covered with darkness, and bound in everlasting frost ; in this, as in other cases, the evil is partial, while the good is general. The evil is also only incidental to the contrivance, not the object of it. In the scheme of a malevolent being we should have seen the reverse ; either the blessing not provided, or the proportions of good and evil so reversed, as to show that evil was the object of design, and good only incidental to it ; that the former was the rule, the latter the exception.

Again, nothing is oftener mentioned, or more justly alleged, as an indication of beneficence in the scheme of nature and providence, than the contrivance for conveying moisture and fertility to the earth, and thus providing sustenance for every living thing, by means of water exhaled from the ocean and the land, suspended in the atmosphere, condensed into vapor, distilled in dew, or showered down in rain. Nor will any be disposed to call in question whether kindness of intention be perceived, and tendency to good, though large portions of it be wasted where it is not wanted, though many regions often suffer for want of a sufficient supply, and although tempests sometimes burst with fury upon the earth, and overwhelming floods lay waste its productions, and destroy or distress its inhabitants.

The animal structure contains a greater number and variety of contrivances for effecting particular purposes than are any where else to be found within the same compass. Can any one of them be mentioned, concerning which a question can arise, whether or

not its intention be kind and its tendency beneficial? There is no one of the senses that does not occasionally become the vehicle of pain, but do we doubt its beneficial design, when we consider its uses and the general character of the sensations it produces? Is there in the human body an organ or a fluid that is either useless to its possessor, or manifestly designed to annoy and to produce pain? Is there a muscle, a bone, or a joint, so situated as to leave room even for the question to be asked, why was not its position more convenient, or useful, or comfortable to its possessor?

The value of almost any possession is best understood by contemplating its loss, and considering what were our situation without it. He that has lost the use of his limbs, or any of his senses, knows how to estimate their worth in a healthful state. Would you know the value of sight, ask the blind man; of hearing, consult the deaf. Would you understand the benefit of a free use of your limbs, appeal to the lame, the maimed, the gouty, or the paralytic.

We look further than to the animal frame. We view man as an intellectual, as a social, and as a moral being, and new proofs occur of the benevolence of the Creator.

First, as an intellectual being. Reason, memory, imagination, are not mere empty distinctions of our nature; they are also high privileges of our being. They serve as well to bless, as to exalt and adorn our nature; to promote and augment our happiness, as to elevate our rank. The very exercise of the faculties

is itself enjoyment of an elevated kind. This is heightened, and new ones are added, when their exercise is crowned with success. The acquisition of knowledge is a good, distinct both from its uses, and from the pleasure that accompanies its pursuit; and would amply compensate the labor of acquisition were not that labor itself, as it is, one of our most delightful occupations.

Secondly. As a social being, what could be more happily constituted than the nature of man, or more kindly ordered than his condition! Those affections, which bind him to his fellows, which prompt him to seek the society of his kind, which give him a lively interest, and dispose him to participate in the state of others, make an essential part of his nature. How much is the social condition improved by the power of speech! Can we doubt whether it were benevolence, that devised so convenient a vehicle for the mutual communication of thought and expression of affection? Why are the relations of life so multiplied and varied, but to increase and to diversify our social and domestic pleasures? That provision is made in our constitution, and in the circumstances in which we are placed, for a constant flow of kind feelings, for the constant exercise of kind offices, and for passing our most delightful moments in the intercourse of the social and domestic relations, is surely different from what might have been expected from a being either malignant in his disposition, or indifferent to the good of his creatures. In the latter case, he would have left but equivocal marks of his disposition toward his creatures

in their disposition toward each other; and in the former, he would have accomplished the full purpose of his malevolence by making men to receive no satisfaction from the kind affections and gentle offices of life; but by forming them in the nearest relations to hate, to harass, and to destroy one another. Whereas, in the present constitution of things, there are affections implanted in us by nature, which the worst men can scarcely eradicate from their hearts, by which they are attached to their kindred, and inclined to acts of love and gentleness. And all hatred and hostility are as manifestly a violation of nature as they are destructive to human happiness.

Thirdly. We may lastly consider man as a moral being, subject to a moral government, capable of discerning right and wrong, of being influenced by motives, and accountable for his actions. We here again meet with proofs of kind intention and benevolent design in the Author of our being. We are not only subjected to a law of righteousness, but we are so formed, and such are the relations in which we are placed, that obedience to the law is our happiness. Not only is the general good of the whole promoted by general virtue, but the individual, who obeys the law of virtue in doing this, insures in the best manner his individual happiness. Now a good being only would thus have associated happiness with goodness, — would have so adjusted our moral feelings as to connect with the consciousness of doing good the purest satisfaction of which we are capable, at the same time that the act itself should be accompanied with the most beneficial results.

The proper practical use of contemplating the divine goodness is to give us a stronger sense of our obligations, and a livelier sentiment of gratitude; to strengthen our pious trust, and lead us to the imitation of that goodness, which we see in the provisions made by the common parent of all for the good of his creatures. This imitation of the divine benevolence will appear in our kind affections and kind offices toward one another; and in promoting, as we have the power, the happiness, and never wantonly, maliciously, or carelessly causing the suffering, of any of the creatures whose condition he has placed in any degree in our power. — Our pious trust will be expressed by habitual cheerfulness under all the allotments of life, and reference of all our interests without anxiety to the divine disposal. — Our gratitude admits of various modes of expression. It will discover itself in our manner of thinking and manner of speaking of the works of God. We must not allow ourselves to think or to speak disrespectfully or lightly of any of the works or the appointments of heaven. We must not indulge impatience in the course of events and order of providence, as if it might or should have been ordered better. Is it grateful, surrounded as we are, and loaded with the favors of heaven, to speak of our condition as miserable, to complain of the evils of life, to speak of this as a bad world, a prison, a ruin, a place of wretchedness and woe, and our being in it not worth the acceptance? It becomes us to speak of the nature God has given us, in all its parts, with admiration, and respect, and thankfulness. It is only as

we have debased it by sin, and forfeited its privileges and distinctions by their neglect or perversion, that we can speak of it without impiety, as a state of degradation and ruin. Nor let us think we have reason to repine and complain of the evils that are necessarily connected with our condition, or that we are authorized on account of them to overlook and despise our manifold blessings. Not repining and complaint, but thanksgiving and praise, cheerful resignation and trust, are due from all creatures to the common Parent, Benefactor, and Friend.

CHAPTER XV.

NATURAL EVIL.

To reconcile the existence of evil in the degree in which it appears in the universe, with the coexistence of unlimited power and unmingled goodness in the Author of nature, is doubtless one of the hardest problems that philosophy or religion has to propose. One method of solving the difficulty has been the supposition of two independent principles concerned in the creation and government of the world, the one benevolent, the author of all good, the other essentially malignant, the author of all evil. This was the doctrine of the ancient Magi, and the more modern Manicheans. An opinion amounting to nearly the same made a part of the religious faith under most of the forms of the ancient polytheism. It has made a part too of the popular belief probably of most Christians in all ages. The author of evil and enemy of God and goodness has been exalted, not indeed to an equality with God, yet to a kind of independency and rivalship, and to a not wholly unsuccessful competition for the dominion of the world.

But reason is soon compelled to reject the notion of two opposite independent principles. The unity of design which is perceived notwithstanding the existence of evil, and the coöperation of evil with good

in many cases in accomplishing the same ends, and the reasons we have to think it may be the case in all, are strong indications, that they proceed from the same original cause, and make a part of the same great scheme. Besides, if evil proceed from a power independent of God, and opposed to his designs, it would seem that it must either detract from his omnipotence, that he is unable to prevent or destroy it, or from the perfection of his goodness in the proportion that he permits it to prevail.

It may be asked, whether any other hypothesis is unencumbered with the same, or with equal difficulties, and not liable to equal objections.

Evil is of two kinds, natural evil, or suffering, and moral evil, or sin. Let us first give our attention to natural evil, or suffering, the existence of which in the works of God is a phenomenon to be explained in consistency with his almighty power and his absolute goodness; that is, entire freedom from malignity.

That suffering in any degree should make part of the plan of a benevolent being, who has nothing above or without himself to limit, restrain, or prevent him from effecting whatever he wills, is what we may never hope to be able with our imperfect faculties so to understand and explain, that the subject shall be pressed with no remaining difficulty. Some considerations, however, may be suggested, which, if they give not entire satisfaction, will remove some part of the objection, lessen the force of what remains, and show that the whole may admit of a satisfactory solution, though for want of more extensive views, it be not in our power to see in what manner.

In the first place, then, a large proportion of natural evils are evils of imperfection ; that is, are the necessary effects of the limitation of our nature and powers. These, it is obvious, are to be laid out of the case, since they belong to our condition as finite beings, and must remain so long as we are anything short of infinite. We are impatient of the feebleness of our faculties, the narrow bounds of our knowledge, the error and uncertainty to which we are liable. Our activity is confined, our strength is limited, our power of motion can be exerted only in a certain way, and to a certain degree.

But if with these circumstances of restriction we are dissatisfied, should we be less so with any enlargement of our powers, while they remained limited at all? Had we the strength of the elephant, and the swiftness of the bird of passage, that we could visit distant regions without the tardiness and weariness to which human travel is subjected, the complaint would still remain, and still might we ask, why have we not the power to remove mountains? and why are we bound to this narrow sphere of motion, why confined to earth, why not allowed to visit other worlds, and other systems? And were our intellectual capacities enlarged to any assignable degree, short of infinite perfection, the question, why are they not larger, why has infinite goodness thus stinted us, might be asked, with the same degree of pertinence, as the same question is asked, in the present degree of their limitation.

There is another view in which imperfection seems

not a reasonable ground of complaint, or occasion for calling in question the Creator's goodness. Men and all living things, though they have an individual existence, and separate and distinct powers and perfections, are yet parts of a whole. Now the benevolence that projected the whole is to be estimated by the sum total of good that is produced; and if a greater sum on the whole is produced by an infinite number and variety of beings, rising from the lowest to the highest degrees of created excellence, than would have been the case had only beings of the highest order been formed, then the limitations to which the lower orders are subject diminish not the force of the argument for the benevolence of the Creator. Besides, the very idea of a whole implies imperfection, incompleteness in its separate parts. It implies too, that each of the parts, however minute, and however imperfect in itself, is necessary to the perfection of the whole. Man could not be what he is, and enjoy what he does, but for the other lower orders of creatures. The loss of the most inconsiderable, by its influence on the next dependent on it, and that again on others, might derange the whole system, and materially affect the condition of every part.

Again, the complaint of imperfection, as an evil, goes on the absurd, and I may add, contradictory notion, that benevolence in an infinite being requires the production of the greatest possible good; that is, that infinite power exhaust itself. But if it does all that it can do, if it produces the greatest effect of which

it is capable, it is limited, it has bounds beyond which it cannot pass ; then it is finite. The very idea of infinite power and infinite goodness is, that, whatever effects it produces, it can still produce other and greater.

One further remark seems proper to be made on that imperfection which is the result of the diversity there is in the creation. It furnishes one of the purest and noblest sources of happiness, for which, without it, there could be no opportunity. Were all beings, as the objection would have it, of the same order, with the same powers, and in the same condition ; equally perfect and happy in the same degree and manner ; there could be no scope for beneficence, no room for participating in that part of the creator's happiness, which consists in communicating good ; of course none for the exercise of kindness on the one part, and of gratitude on the other ; none for the mutual interchange of good offices and good dispositions.

I proceed to remark, secondly, respecting natural evils, that a large proportion of those, which are most the subject of complaint, are effects of the operation of general laws, which laws in their tendency and usual effects are beneficial. Are such laws, then, to have no place in the universe ? Is all to be done by special provision, and by single, insulated, unconnected, independent acts ? But it is on general laws, that the whole order of the universe depends. On them are founded all our calculations, and all our provisions for the future ; our sense of stability in the order of nature, and of security under the government of providence.

The good is constant, the evil occasional ; the good is permanent, the evil transient ; the good is the natural, the evil only an incidental effect ; the good is the direct object of design, the evil only incidentally connected with it. The water that serves a thousand beneficial purposes, may occasionally produce the most destructive effects. The fire that warms and cheers you, may also consume your dwelling. But in each case the benefit is constant, the evil infrequent ; the one takes place by a permanent tendency, the other by accident. By the operation of gravity a man is crushed under a falling tower, or he tumbles from a precipice, and perishes. Is the law of gravity then an evil ? But it is the same law, that upholds the order of nature. Let it be suspended, and the universe instantly returns to chaos.

We may observe, thirdly, that some of the evils that afflict us, though real evils to a certain extent, are yet blessings, when considered as salutary cautions to prevent our falling into still greater evils. We may instance, as belonging to this description, bodily pain. This is kindly appointed to warn us of danger, and to guard against mischief. But for the pain of hunger, how liable should we be to perish for want of that friendly notice ? And but for the pain of repletion, how many would indulge their appetite to the destruction of health and life ? Were there no pain in burning, what would save us in thousands of cases from becoming victims to the devouring element, before we had notice of our danger ? Were there no suffering in bodily disease, how long might

it lurk in our system, flow in our circulations, fatally strengthen itself, and undermine the powers of life, before we were aware of our danger? The suffering of incipient disease is our friendly monitor to check intemperance and voluptuousness before they prove destructive.

The host of mental troubles have also the same friendly office, — disgust, vexation, grief, shame, remorse. These are often severe sufferings, evils that we would gladly dispense with; but they are useful, salutary, friendly notices, to remind us of faults to be corrected, or warn us of evils to be shunned. They are the kind appointment of benevolence, not the infliction of vengeance; and their ultimate design and tendency may be seen to be eventual improvement and happiness by means of temporary and disciplinary suffering.

A fourth remark is, that the objection to the existence of evil as inconsistent with the goodness of God, is in great part founded in our ignorance. We are finite, shortsighted; can see but a part of the divine plan, and know but little of remote tendencies, and of ultimate design. We have but imperfect knowledge too, and can but partially distinguish means and ends.

Now we can see with respect to some, and have reason to believe with respect to many things of which we are ready to complain, that they are means to the attainment of some greater good. Numerous instances might be adduced for illustration.

The shapeless rock seems to you at first an incum-

brance and a blemish on the face of our globe, useless at least if not worse than useless. You see it again by the skill and industry of man wrought into shape and comeliness, and applied to important uses. You see it under the hand of the artist, and what before was an evil, you admire as a valuable gift. You ask, why are certain portions of the mineral, certain classes of the vegetable, certain tribes or families of the animal kingdom, armed with poisonous and destructive qualities? But your disposition to accuse the Creator is checked, when you recollect the use of some of them for defence and security, when you see the antidote provided, as well as the poison, especially when you discover the important uses to which the most deadly may be applied. When you are told, that the poppy and the hemlock, the mercury, antimony, and arsenic, have obtained important places in medicine, and are employed with success in the cure of the most fatal diseases, you are led to acknowledge the hand of kindness and mercy, where at first there seemed only tokens of wrath, and instruments of punishment.

A fifth remark is, that liability to pain and suffering seems to be the necessary consequence of an organization and of faculties by which we are capable of pleasure. They are the same senses that are the instruments of agreeable and of painful sensations. We have not a peculiar set of organs for the one, distinct from those that convey the other. So that a change in our make, that should deliver us from the one, must deprive us also of the other.

What is thus said of our external, may be said also of our internal organization. It is the same structure of mind, the same faculties, the same affections, which are the source of our pains and our pleasures. We are susceptible of shame, only in proportion as we are alive to the sense of honor and praise. That we feel disgust and resentment under a sense of wrong, is from the same moral temperament that makes us capable of the delightful emotions of gratitude and love. That we are tormented with remorse, is because we are endued with that lively perception of what is right and wrong, which is the ground of all our self-approbation, and the satisfaction of conscious virtue. Would we in either case have been wholly exempt from the liability to the evil, it must have been by excluding the good, which flows to us in the same channel.

A similar remark may be extended to the various relations in which we are placed. A large proportion of mortal sufferings grows out of the domestic and social relations, and our relation to other orders of creatures, the same relations from which we derive most of the satisfactions, with which our condition is enlivened and blessed. Our social blessings and our social evils, our domestic comforts and domestic trials, all grow on the same stock; all depend upon and flow from the same circumstances in our condition; and it is not easy to see how the one can be enjoyed without a liability to the other.

I might remark, that some evils are not necessary, are not unavoidable, are brought upon us by our own

fault or neglect, and are therefore no just ground of complaint. I might say, that some are means to superior advantages, that some prove incentives to the more vigorous exertion and better use of our faculties, and that some have a direct and powerful influence on our moral improvement.

I shall add only one further consideration. It respects what is usually reckoned the greatest evil to which our nature is subject, the termination of our earthly existence by death. I have before said, that many of our evils have their compensation, are connected with some good not otherwise to be attained, or are means to some desirable end. With respect to some evils this is readily perceived and acknowledged ; but few probably have been used to contemplate death in this light. Yet whoever will reflect how much of the happiness of men and of the whole animal world arises out of the conjugal, parental, and filial relations, the affections which are peculiar to those relations, and the duties which they impose, will readily see how this may be the case. For these relations are peculiar to beings existing by successive generations ; and this world could be peopled by a succession of beings only by means of death. Mortality is implied in it. One generation must pass away, as another cometh. That the world may not soon be overstocked with its inhabitants, death must intervene to remove the succession of generations.

CHAPTER XVI.

MORAL EVIL.

A PART of the considerations, which apply to Natural Evil, are applicable to Moral Evil. This also has some relation to the limitation of our faculties, and takes place by that same constitution of our nature by which we are capable of virtue.

In the first place, the liability to moral evil is the necessary consequence of the whole of that constitution of our nature, by which we are free and accountable beings. We must be free to do wrong by the same constitution by which we are free to do right; we must be capable of vice by the same faculties, by which we are capable of virtue. It is not easy to see, that moral evil could have been certainly prevented, but by depriving man of his moral agency.

The question, then, will be reduced to this, — whether the goodness of God would have been better manifested, had there been no beings created, that were endued with the powers of moral agency. This will hardly be maintained or imagined by any. In the gradation of being, as we rise through the several stages of vegetable, animal, intellectual, and moral life, there is a correspondent gradation in the power and goodness manifested in their production. The beings of each higher order have a higher sphere of

action, have more and nobler sources of enjoyment, and present higher proofs both of the power and of the benevolence of Him, who has thus made and endued them. That they have in any degree abused or neglected the privileges of their nature, will hardly be thought to cancel the obligation of the gift, or to show that it was not in itself a blessing. If we have abused our moral liberty, it lessens not the kindness that granted it to us.

Nor have we any better ground of complaint of those animal appetites, the improper indulgence of which makes a part of the moral evil, that is in the world. Those appetites are in themselves good, and they could not have been sufficiently strong to answer their design, without being liable to become the occasion of evil by their excess. The same may be said of the passions and affections. These enter into our virtues as well as our vices ; they are as essential to form a good character, as a bad one. It is only in their excess or their misapplication, that they become an evil. They are the same passions and affections, differently modified and directed, that lead to the best and the worst actions, and go to form characters of the most exalted virtue, or most degrading vice.

It may perhaps be imagined, that although the goodness of God did not require that the possibility of moral evil should be prevented by creating no beings, who should be liable to it ; yet that the liability to it might have been far less than it is. It may be imagined that temptation should have been

less, and the power of resistance greater; that the appetites, passions, and affections should have been weaker, and the reason and moral discernment, which are to balance them, stronger. That this might have been the case, we can have no doubt; but that it would have been a better scheme than the present, and more clearly indicate the goodness of the Creator, will not follow so certainly, as we might at first apprehend. We know not how far the same change in our moral constitution and condition, which should diminish the temptations to vice, might also enfeeble our virtues. We have reason to think, that it would at least diminish them in equal degree; and if in the present state of things there is on the whole a balance in favor of good, the degree in which there is such a preponderance of good over evil must be constantly diminished by the change proposed, since it must wholly vanish as soon as it is extended so far, as to destroy free moral agency.

But besides, some positive benefits may be discerned in a constitution of things in which the trial of virtue is severe, the temptations to vice strong and numerous, and even where the difficulties attending a course of right conduct are increased by examples of defection. The principles of virtue, in those who are thus exposed to trial, are strengthened. They rise to higher excellence, and a more confirmed and vigorous character, than they would have done in circumstances, which called for less exertion of the moral faculty; in the same manner, as all our bodily

and intellectual faculties acquire strength by use, and become capable of higher exertion and greater effects, nearly in proportion to the degree in which their strength is called forth.

These are visible tendencies and certain effects in the present order of things. How far the same effects might have been produced by a different constitution, it is impossible for us to know. But if it were possible for the habit of virtue, and great strength of the virtuous principle, and a character of exalted moral excellence to be possessed, without having been formed in a state of trial and temptation, and a liability to the opposite issue,—it would show, not that the present constitution was inconsistent with goodness, but only that there might have been a scheme of more perfect and unmingled goodness.

But there is another view, in which it seems important to consider this subject. It seems important to take into our consideration the indications which may be discovered of the light in which moral evil is regarded by God. If distinct and decisive expressions of his disapprobation appear, and none, that it is the object of his approbation and encouragement, it may show us, that whatever account may be given of its existence, or of the degree in which it is permitted, it is to be resolved into anything rather than a defect of that goodness, which should dispose him to prevent it; it may lead us to the probable inference, that as far as it is permitted, a greater good is on the whole the result, than would have followed its absolute prevention.

Now the indications of the divine disapprobation of moral evil are neither few nor equivocal. Nothing indeed can be more distinct and decisive, than the expressions of the displeasure of Almighty God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. This will appear in the provisions he has made in the constitution of nature, in the first place for its prevention, and in the second for its punishment.

The moral discernment, by which we are capable of distinguishing between right and wrong, is attended with a sentiment of approbation of the one, and disapprobation of the other, and when applied to ourselves, with a sense of guilt and self-condemnation on the one hand, and of conscious virtue on the other. Now the sense of guilt is regret, remorse, shame, and sorrow, and these are all painful and distressing feelings, calculated to deter from the repetition of actions, of which we find them to be the consequence. Self-approbation, on the other hand, conscious rectitude, is always a grateful feeling, and can hardly fail to strengthen the motive to continue in the course of life, in which we have once felt it. Here then have we, in the very faculties and constitution God has given us, the expression of his will. The power of conscience is the voice of God within us. Its decisions on the past are admonitions and warnings in respect to the future. As soon as one begins a course of virtue, his motive to proceed is strengthened. The satisfaction it gives is an immediate, and daily increasing inducement to go on. The very entrance on a course of vice, on the other hand,

brings shame, and remorse, and fear. A sense of guilt and of danger is felt. These continually increase, and every step of advance heightens the dissatisfaction that is experienced, and adds strength to the motive to return to virtue.

Besides this, as an indication of the will and disposition of our Maker, it is not an unimportant consideration, that there is nothing in our constitution whose original design and tendency is to moral evil. Not a single appetite, or passion, or principle in our nature has vice for its direct object, or leads to it by a necessary and unavoidable tendency. Many of the worst passions of the human heart are the excess only, or the perversion and abuse, of those, which in their original design and natural tendency are good. The qualities of our nature, which enter into the characters of the worst men, are the same that are found in those of exalted worth, and are even the basis and the germ of their virtues. We have here then another provision in the constitution of things in favor of virtue and for the prevention of moral evil, and another unequivocal notice, as moral evil is the direct object and original design of nothing in our nature or our condition, that its existence is not to be attributed to a defect of goodness in the author of nature.

The penal effects of sin, as they take place in the natural course of things, make another part of those considerations, from which we may come to the same inference. The effects to which I refer are constantly seen and universally experienced. There is a

general tendency of moral evil to produce natural evil, and in that to find its remedy. Every kind of excess tends to pain, disorder, and misery, and these are divine admonitions to correct the excess. He who neglects his blessings loses them by the neglect. The abuse of privileges and opportunities is the occasion of their being taken away. Take away the neglected talent and give it to him who hath ten, is the decision of nature as well as of the Author of Christianity. The indulgence of any of the appetites beyond the bounds of reason and moderation brings on disease, and suffering, and perhaps death. In the disorder and misrule of the passions, men are sure to meet with much to afflict and torment them. The punishment of indolence is want and dependence; that of dishonesty is degradation and infamy; deeds of violence or cruelty usually bring returns of a correspondent character; not unfrequently such as shall extort the confession, "As I have done, so God hath requited me." On the other hand, the general tendency of right conduct is to happiness.—These tendencies of virtue and vice to their several results are established in nature. They are the appointment of heaven, and discover to us, in a manner that cannot be mistaken, that the Author of nature and Moral Governor of the world is the friend of virtue and the punisher of wickedness.

But the evidence of this does not stop here. The consequences of guilt and its punishment fall not only on the guilty person himself. Such is the constitution of things, that its effects are sometimes felt extensive-

ly, and for a long time. By the crimes, and through the bad passions of one man are sometimes the heaviest calamities brought on a whole nation; and not unfrequently are the fatal consequences of the guilt of one generation seen in the sufferings of several succeeding. Are these distant, remote, and long continued effects of human actions, falling on others than those by whom they were committed, inconsistent with a righteous moral distribution? 'They are intended to strengthen the motive to virtue, and increase the abhorrence and dread of vice. If our conduct brings after it so long a train of consequences, not to ourselves only, but also to others, and often to those who are dear to us, the reason for care in its choice and its regulation is strengthened.

To the legislator, the magistrate, the minister of religion, the instructor of youth, and every man in public station, the motive to right conduct is increased by the consideration, that its consequences are not confined to himself, but, whether good or bad, will be extensively felt. This motive is calculated to operate with peculiar force and effect on parents. It may be expected to be more powerful than all others to prevent them from engaging in courses, which might bring disgrace, or poverty, or disease, or any great and permanent evil or disadvantage upon their children; — especially to induce them to the care of their education, considering how almost entirely the future condition and character of their children are now put into their hands, and will depend on the fidelity and judgment with which they shall discharge the trust.

On the other hand, the power of the child over the happiness of the parent is not less than that of the parent over the prospects and hopes of the child. No ingenuous youth can be a stranger to so pure and elevated a motive. He feels that in every virtuous action, in every laudable improvement, in every kind affection, in every worthy habit, he is answering the wishes and hopes of those who are most dear to him. He knows also that no severer pang could he cause them to suffer, than by the disappointment of their just hopes, by the neglect of his opportunities, by habits of vice, or by unworthy deeds. The principle of virtue is thus strengthened, and the motives to it confirmed. In the time of trial and season of temptation he has here an effectual security from the deed that would bring regret or shame. He checks the momentary feeling, or subdues the rising passion, which personal considerations might have failed to restrain, and the generous sentiment of filial piety saves him from entering the forbidden course, or checks him in its progress.

But the consequences of the conduct of rational and accountable beings are not limited to the present life. By the light of nature alone we have strong reasons for apprehending that they may reach beyond it, and that moral evil will be followed with similar punishments, or others more effectual, in a future world. And these apprehensions of something future, are further notices of the will and purposes of God; are further assurances, drawn from the constitution of our nature itself, and our natural feelings

and apprehensions, of the disposition of Him who has implanted them in us.

But we are not left to these deductions alone. What nature has hinted to us as a probable part of the divine scheme now going on, and the result in which it may issue, revelation has assured us, will in fact take place. It thus comes in powerful confirmation of the language of nature, and can leave us in no doubt in what sense we are to consider the moral evil there is in the world, as making a part of the great scheme of the divine economy. The same design and purpose, which are seen in the whole constitution of nature, are seen still more distinctly in the whole course of the divine dispensations, of which revelation gives us the account. Not only "is the wrath of God therein revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," and the divine disapprobation of it thus indicated, but every part of the scheme is expressly directed against moral evil. "For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." And that "grace of God which has appeared bringing salvation," effects its purpose of mercy by teaching men "to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in the present world;" knowing that he who gave himself for us did it for the purpose of promoting this same end, — "to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

CHAPTER XVII.

MERCY.

GOODNESS is concerned in producing happiness ; it is the attribute of Mercy to relieve suffering, and remit punishment ; and our proof that God is merciful must be equal to the provisions we can discover in the constitution of nature for these two purposes.

A great deal of suffering we certainly see in the world, and much of that suffering is clearly to be considered as divine punishment. It is the consequence of our own conduct ; of conduct, to which in the natural course of things suffering is annexed, and of which suffering we have the clear foresight.

Much, however, that men suffer, has no immediate connexion with their own conduct ; it is brought upon them by their relation to others, or is the effect of general laws. Now, whatever relief is provided in the constitution of nature for either of these descriptions of suffering, is to be attributed to Mercy, and serves to discover to us the merciful character of Him who established that constitution.

With respect to all those sufferings, which are incident to our nature and condition as dependent beings of limited capacities, and placed in a great variety of relations to other beings equally dependent and im-

perfect, we see that preventives, alleviations, and remedies are in many cases provided.

Pain, sickness, disappointment, losses, are the common lot of men. They belong to every period, and befall men in every condition of life. When we consider the degree of exposure to them, the innumerable sources from which they may come, how many circumstances must concur to place us at ease and peace, and make our state even tolerable at any one time, — we might be led to conclude that pain and disquiet must inevitably be the usual lot of life. Every part of our frame is liable to pain, and the slightest disturbance of its order may inflict the severest pangs. The peculiar delicacy of some of our organs, and the constant exposure and extreme sensibility of others, would seem to render it probable that injury must be so frequent as to make pain and suffering the common state of man, and freedom from them rare and unusual. Consider that every breath you draw, any particle of food you receive, may throw the whole system into disorder; that you take not a step nor move a limb without the danger of producing pain and disease.

Yet with all these infinitely multiplied and constant exposures, injuries to the system and consequent suffering from them are comparatively rare and infrequent. Our usual state is that of ease and health. In this prevention of effects which might have been expected, by an original disposition which serves to guard against them, we see the indications of kindness. When they actually take place, how many circumstances are there that contribute to mitigate the

degree of suffering, and render it more tolerable ! This is something more than prospective kindness. It seems to spring from compassion in the Author of nature for the actual suffering of his creatures. Still more so is this to be seen and acknowledged, where not alleviations only, but effectual remedies, are provided. Now both alleviations and remedies occur, not occasionally and incidentally only, but constantly, in the regular course of things, and by original and permanent provisions. Examples offer themselves to our constant observation. There is a healing and restoring power in nature, by which injuries to the system are repaired, wounds inflicted on the body are healed, remedies are provided for afflictive diseases, disorders are rectified that occur in the affairs and interests of life ; and these relate to the intellectual and moral as well as the physical concerns of men.

But in seeking indications and evidences of the divine mercy, we are chiefly concerned with what relates to provisions for counteracting the effects of our own misconduct and preventing or correcting those evils which we voluntarily bring upon ourselves. If the provisions in question extended only to those evils which are occasioned by no fault of our own, the evidences of mercy in them would be less clear and decisive. It might with some show of reason be urged, that here were indeed proofs of benevolence and kindness in the Author of nature, but no proof that his good will toward his creatures would ever lead him to go beyond the limits of strict justice in their favor.

Now what are the facts that offer themselves to our notice? Not only is provision made in the constitution of nature for the mitigation of human suffering, but of that suffering which men bring upon themselves. Not only are remedies provided for evils, but for those evils which are the consequence of our own actions, and which were appointed in the original constitution of things for punishment and correction. These preventives, mitigations, and remedies are not universal. They are far from it. But they are of sufficient frequency, and in cases sufficiently important, to mark the disposition, and give some intimation of the purposes, of the Author and Lord of nature. They sometimes take place without any previous indications of repentance, or of a return to prudence, wisdom, and a sense of duty, and thus without any pledges of future good conduct. But usually it is otherwise. Relief is provided, not for those who persist in the wrong course, but for those who have forsaken it; not for those who are going on in the career of folly or vice, but for those who have returned to wisdom and virtue. So that mercy has still its moral tendency, and is exercised in consistency with, and in such a manner as to promote, the great moral design.

God has appointed that indolence shall lead to poverty and want, and thoughtlessness and folly issue in dishonor and ruin. But let the indolent and thoughtless turn to industry and prudence, and how soon are his condition and his prospects changed with his character! Some of the consequences of his former folly still pursue him, and the whole perhaps he can never

entirely escape ; but the immediate effects of a change of character are sufficient to encourage reformation, and to give assurance of the mercy of God.

It is the ordinance of heaven, made known in the constitution of nature, that voluptuous and sensual excess shall be punished with disease, and sorrow, and untimely death. But it is provided, that within certain limits, a return to temperance and sobriety shall prevent these effects, though beyond those bounds no sincerity and no degree of reform will be of any avail.

The miseries, that follow the misrule and disorder of the passions, will in some measure cease as soon as those disorders are corrected. The very first step toward the correction of a bad habit is a step toward recovering from the slavery in which it has bound one ; and when its fetters are entirely broken and its power dissolved, not only do its effects cease, but sometimes a sense of freedom, satisfaction, and self-approbation is felt, beyond what belongs even to him whose habits have been uniformly good. Such is the encouragement to those vigorous efforts, which are necessary to him who would burst from the dominion of inveterate habit !

To the neglect of early opportunities, the abuse of talents and privileges, the perversion of the endowments of nature, God has annexed severe penalties. And they are unfailingly executed. The suffering is immediate, and not to be evaded. Like all other mischiefs which men bring upon themselves, its

termination is to be looked for only when the cause of it is removed. That the punishment is then withdrawn, and the evil repaired in any degree, is to be acknowledged as a provision of Mercy. It would have been no impeachment of the justice of God, had such been the constitution of things, that the consequences of wrong had been final and irretrievable. But in this, as in other instances, the indications of a constitution encouraging repentance and reform, by providing for remission of punishment, are clear and decisive.

Indications of mercy in the constitution of nature of a less obvious and obtrusive kind, are not less satisfactory. The evils, which a man does not guard against himself, are often warded off from him by the interposition of others. The principle of sympathy in our nature is a universal, constant, and active agent in preventing and diminishing the miseries of the human condition. It operates powerfully in all, even in the worst of men; and as much as there is of hostility, and hatred, and oppression in the world to augment the sufferings of humanity, we have reason to believe, that, — taking in the whole operation of the kind affections, in general good will, in personal friendship, in the courtesies of neighborhood, especially in the nearer relations of social and domestic life, — for every positive deed of cruelty and ill will, there are many acts of kindness and affection. Now that we are so constituted and so related to each other, that the means and disposition of doing each other

good should be thus constant and universal, and the opposite disposition of malignity, and correspondent conduct, comparatively rare and infrequent, is one of the clearest proofs we can have of what is the disposition of Him who has so constituted us, and so ordered our condition.

Can we doubt the merciful purposes of the Author of nature, when we survey the whole or almost any part of that constitution of things under which we are here placed? Why are those affections implanted in our nature, by which we are so sensible to the sorrows of others, so instantly sympathize in whatever ill befalls them, and so spontaneously wish, and so readily exert ourselves, when we have the power, to give relief? Why are we so constituted, that the suffering even of a personal enemy instantly disarms our resentment, and excites our commiseration? Have we more compassion, kinder affections, better dispositions, than He who made us?

There is again in human nature a readiness to forgive injuries, and to be reconciled to those who have done us wrong, whenever they manifest penitence, and a disposition to repair the wrong. So rare is an unrelenting, implacable temper in men, that we are shocked when we meet with it; we view him as a monster who is inexorable and unforgiving, and will hardly allow him a share in our common nature. Can we doubt whether He who has given us this nature, is less ready than ourselves to forgive the penitent, and to remit that punishment which a return to duty

has rendered no longer necessary to the purposes of his moral government ?

That God is merciful, that he is rich in mercy, the evidence from the brief views we have taken of a few parts of the constitution of nature is exceedingly satisfactory. Yet it may not be easy, from the light of nature only, to ascertain to what degree the divine mercy may extend. We see that the whole constitution of nature assures us of the placability of the divine character, and favors the expectation, that, as mercy is shown to the penitent in this life, it may be in the life to come ; that, as many of the natural consequences of sin are prevented here, so also its penal effects beyond this life, being a part of the same great scheme of moral government, may be prevented also. The inference so far seems to be just, and to have sufficient foundation to excite reasonable hopes. But is it sufficient to assure even those whose repentance is most perfect, and their return to virtue complete, that it will operate to their exemption from the whole effects which would have followed a course of sin ? Is it enough to give them confidence in the expectation, that repentance will restore all the benefits of innocence, and that it will be as well with him who returns to virtue after a course of vice, as with him who had always kept himself pure ?

The experience and observation of what takes place in this life will be far short of bringing him to this conclusion. The mercy of God in the remission

of punishment in this life has its limits. The natural and penal consequences of sin are mitigated on a return to virtue, but seldom if ever are they entirely removed. He, whose early years have been spent in profligacy and vice, may by future diligence and purity recover some of the advantages he has lost, and by perseverance in well doing have all the benefit of his future right course. But some of the effects of the past will long remain. "No bitterness of repentance, nor sincerity of amendment will save him wholly from possessing the sins of his youth. It will neither mend a broken constitution nor repair a ruined fortune, nor recover to its native vigor and activity an enfeebled understanding." Never can it wholly take away the sting of remorse, never can it repair all the evils, nor obliterate the remembrance, nor prevent the painful and mortifying recollection of unrepaired and irreparable wrongs; and never can it therefore, without some further light, remove entirely the apprehension that inexorable justice may follow them into a future life with the visitation of that punishment which they had escaped in this.

Hence has it always happened, that unaided reason, with all its proofs of benignity and mercy in the Author of nature, has yet, in the consciousness of ill desert, been afflicted with doubts and fears. Hence has it always, distrusting the efficacy of repentance, and not understanding the freedom and extent of the divine mercy, been seeking some expedient, and disposed to resort to something as a substitute, or a supply for its deficiency; some offering, which may ex-

piate guilt, give a value to repentance, and reconcile offended justice.

For a full understanding of this part of the divine character, more than any other, for removing the doubts and fears of nature, for withdrawing us from a reliance on expedients and substitutes, and teaching the free mercy of God, we are indebted to the light of revelation. We there meet with nothing to contradict, but everything to confirm, the deductions drawn from observations on the constitution of nature and course of providence. And besides this confirmation of the best hopes of nature and reason, we have unfolded to us the whole scheme of the divine mercy in the series of dispensations for recovering our world from corruption, and restoring it to purity and virtue. We are there assured of what we had seen enough before to raise the confident belief, that "unto the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses." And we are there informed in what manner and by what means his purposes of grace are accomplished. The most illustrious expression of it, and inclusive of all the rest, is the gift of his Son to be the Saviour of the world.

And let it not be forgotten, that the same light, which reveals to us the essential mercy of God, makes known to us also its consistency with the great moral purposes of the divine government. It is not so represented as to encourage licentiousness. It offers no hopes, and makes no promises, to those who continue in the course of sin. It is to those only who come to true repentance and holiness, that the

promises of forgiveness and ultimate happiness belong. It is for them only that those rewards and blessings are prepared, which no finite merit can reach, which no human virtue can claim, and which can be the free gift only of a being infinite in power and infinite in mercy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOLINESS.

By the Holiness of God we mean his freedom from all moral pollution, his love of righteousness, purity, and truth, and his hatred and disapprobation of all sin.

The proofs that God is the lover of righteousness and hater of iniquity may be drawn from several circumstances, and are very clear and decisive.

In the first place, we may infer it from our own moral nature. Our nature, whatever it be, is such as he has given us; and from nothing can we infer with greater certainty what are his disposition and will. We find originally implanted in us, and common to all our race, a power of making moral distinctions, of perceiving the difference between right and wrong; and in most cases of judging, with a great degree of readiness, accuracy, and uniformity, of the character of our own actions and that of others. In addition to this discriminating power, connected with it, and exactly corresponding with it, is that of approving and disapproving our own deeds and those of others, according to their moral character. We spontaneously apply these decisions of the understanding and expressions of our moral feeling, to all that conduct of others, that falls under our observation.

We never regard with indifference even that part of it, in which we feel no personal interest, and by which we are in no way affected. Exalted virtue, distinguished examples of purity, disinterestedness, control of the passions, receive our admiration and esteem, and excite our confidence. On the other hand, falsehood, treachery, cruelty, and brutal subjection to the appetites and passions excite aversion and abhorrence ; we feel no esteem, and put no confidence where we discover these traits of character. A still stronger sentiment is felt, and we are inclined to stronger and more decisive expressions of it, as we are placed in nearer relations ; and in circumstances to be personally affected by the actions and the dispositions, which we thus approve or disapprove. All our gratitude and resentment, all our personal attachments and personal dislikes, are founded on our experience of the dispositions and actions of others, in which this difference of moral character is displayed.

But there are still stronger indications of a right moral constitution, in other expressions of our natural sense of the excellency of virtue, and the odiousness of vice. These expressions are not limited to the conduct of others. We pass judgment also on our own. And our judgment is grounded on the same principles, and guided by the same moral distinctions, when thus applied, as when it relates to that of others. Hence the whole power of conscience ; the self-approbation, self-complacency, peace of mind, which attend a course of virtue, and the shame, remorse, sense of ill desert, and corrodings of heart, which

pursue guilt. The whole of this takes place independently of any apprehended connexion of our conduct with our condition, or supposed influence it may have on the opinions and estimate of others. Shame and fear and remorse will pursue a sense of guilt into the most elevated scenes of prosperity, and fill the heart with bitterness, amidst all the external signs of satisfaction and ease. On the other hand, the internal rewards of virtue depend not on any external circumstances that may attend it. They are distinct and independent of outward success. The slander, that robs a man of the reputation of his good deeds, cannot rob him of his self-approbation in the remembrance of them. The ingratitude, that returns injuries for kindness, cannot deprive him of the satisfaction and elevation of mind inseparable from a disinterested spirit, and the recollection of generous deeds. Neither poverty, nor misfortune, nor the disappointment of his just expectations, will prevent an honest man from reflecting with pleasure on a life of integrity and uprightness. The most unblemished virtue may be misrepresented, the best actions misunderstood, the purest motives mistaken ; but neither the malice that perverts and discolours your deeds, nor the ignorance or weakness that is incapable of comprehending your motives, nor the carelessness that mistakes them, can rob you of the consciousness of your good dispositions and intentions, nor of the pleasant recollection of the good you have actually done. In like manner, a sense of ill desert and guilt is distinct from any bad consequences either

experienced or apprehended. How will the heart sicken, and the blush of shame cover you, when the reputation of actions is bestowed on you, which you know belongs to another, — actions, which you had not the virtue to perform, and which you have not the magnanimity to disclaim! Or when honorable and generous motives are attributed to actions, in which you are conscious of having had no other than base, selfish, and hypocritical views!

This natural sense of right and wrong, of honor and shame, of good and ill desert, may doubtless be corrupted, perverted, and sometimes nearly, perhaps wholly, lost. Still it is natural, it is strong, it is to a great degree uniform. It exists in all ages, in all nations. It is never inverted, so that injustice, falsehood, treachery, hypocrisy, cruelty, ingratitude, should be the objects of our approbation and complacency. Can we for a moment doubt, what is the character and what are the purposes of that Being, who has so formed our nature? Can it once enter into our imagination, that his love of holiness and virtue, and his sense of their excellence, or his disapprobation and abhorrence of sin, may be less strong, than that which he has thus implanted in his creatures? “He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?” He that has given a moral discernment and moral feeling to man, has he imparted that, in which he is defective himself?

This argument, it will be seen, proceeds on the assumption, that the moral constitution of man is such as is here described. If it be such, as it is sometimes

represented to be, the argument fails. Were it the reverse of what it has now been described to be, the opposite inferences would follow ; and it might not be easy to find satisfactory proof, that the Author of our nature is not indifferent at least to the moral character of his creatures.

I proceed to infer the holiness of God, in the second place, from the moral government under which we are placed. There can be no doubt as to the fact of our being under such a government. The whole of our condition and the whole treatment we receive plainly show it. It appears in the general connexion unquestionably established between virtue and happiness, and vice and misery, in this life. It appears in that state of mutual dependence in which we are placed, which renders the kind affections so necessary, and the bad passions so pernicious and hurtful ; which renders the practice of justice, truth, fidelity, benevolence so promotive of our peace and happiness, and the contrary practices so utterly incompatible with the good condition of human society. It is seen in the necessity, and in the whole structure, of domestic and civil government, without which society could not exist, and the human race could hardly be continued on the earth.

This government is a discipline of virtue. In every part of it, it is adapted to teach us the excellence and value of virtue, to give us a deep sense of its obligation ; — that it is suitable to our nature, that it is our highest interest, that it is the only path of safety.

Motives to the practice of virtue are presented in every view and at every step, and considerations to deter from vice meet us at every turn. We come into life impotent, helpless, ignorant, dependent. The state of dependence is a discipline to several important virtues both in the child and in the parent: On the one hand, submission to just authority and restraint of the passions so necessary to future self-government; and humility, gratitude, and filial respect, the foundation of so many of the manly virtues; are early wrought into the character, and become fixed and established habits. On the other, the kindest affections of the human heart are called into constant exercise; to protect, rear up, instruct, and provide for the natural, intellectual, and moral wants of a dependent being, becomes the habitual care and one of the most important and dearest interests of life. How many virtues are here brought into exercise, are strengthened, and become habitual, I need not mention. In the same manner, if not to the same degree, do all the domestic and social relations, and the whole economy of civil society prove a school of virtue. They enlarge the affections, correct selfishness, furnish scope for the faculties, and give opportunity for the display of character. The business of life and its interests answer the same moral purposes, and can in no form be pursued without the exercise of the moral faculties, and some influence upon the moral character.

In all the business, interests, and relations of life, however multiplied, however varied, there is one law,

and one principle prevails. It is this, — and it constitutes my third argument in proof of the divine Holiness ; — Virtue is happiness ; wholly and unfailingly in original tendency, prevailing in effect. If it be so, can there be a clearer or a stronger proof, that He, who has thus appointed the original tendencies of our actions, is himself a pure and holy being, who approves and delights in virtue, — seeing the whole scheme of his government is contrived to encourage, to give it scope, and to reward it ? Of the tendency of every pure and benevolent affection and every right action to promote human happiness, can there be a reasonable doubt ?

It is true, that in various ways and by various means this tendency may be counteracted, and the effect prevented. Our virtues are sometimes clogged and choked by the vices among which they grow ; and sometimes they are nearly useless by standing alone. For the efficacy of the virtues, like the effect of human exertion, often depends on union and the coöperation of several to produce a single result, the absence of any one of which must prevent the effect and defeat the design. We are, again, in this life placed very much in the power of one another, and some important purposes are answered by it. But in consequence of this, the natural tendency of the good man's virtue is sometimes prevented by the passions or the vices of the bad man, with whom he is connected. Thus mildness and gentleness become the victims of violence and passion ; integrity is the prey of fraud and injustice.

Humility is trampled on by arrogance and pride. — And further, the happiness of the present life is made up of a great variety of circumstances, some of them wholly independent of moral desert, and distinct from it; though none of them opposite and incompatible. Now in the combination of these it may sometimes happen, that, with great defects of character, there shall be a remarkable concurrence of other circumstances, which go to make up a state of ease, prosperity, and happiness; and likewise that, with distinguished excellence of character, there shall be a remarkable deficiency of other circumstances which contribute to human well being. So that it shall sometimes in reality, and oftener apparently, “happen to the righteous according to the work of the wicked, and to the wicked according to the work of the righteous.”

Still, — notwithstanding what there is promiscuous in the distributions of this life, and notwithstanding all that can be alleged as to the causes which conspire to render the effects of virtue uncertain, — so much is there remaining of the unimpeded and unprevented effects of virtue, that it can never be doubtful whether it be the real interest of the present life, and whether the Author of our nature and condition have given it the seal of his approbation. Had he been indifferent to the moral character of his rational offspring, had he been regardless whether sin or holiness prevailed, he might have appointed no such connexion, as we now see, between the character and the happiness of his creatures. He might

have endued them with no moral nature ; have given them no perception of moral distinctions ; no conscience to disturb the tranquillity of sin ; no sense of the approbation of virtue and disapprobation of vice, to expose them to self-condemnation and the punishment of their fellow beings, when pursuing the course of vice, nor to give them peace and joy, hope and self-confidence within, and the approving sentence of their fellow beings, when pursuing that of virtue.

We have reasons then in our nature and our condition to believe that God is a holy being. This belief should inspire us with reverence. It is of most serious import to us, and cannot by a reasonable being be reflected on with unconcern. It should lead us to the expectation of a just and perfect retribution. In the present life we see the operations of justice impeded, and its ends not fully accomplished. Yet enough appears to excite the apprehension of that perfect future recompense, of which revelation has given us the explicit assurance. And it should lead us to the imitation of that moral perfection, which is the object of our reverence, that, by attaining to some resemblance here of Him, whose favor is all our hope, we may be prepared for his presence in the abodes of purity and truth.

CHAPTER XIX.

JUSTICE.

MAN, imperfect man, has a natural sense of Justice, and a natural respect for its claims. Can we think that He who planted in him this original sentiment, is Himself regardless of its claims?

Yet there are facts and appearances which present powerful objections, and seem at first to render it questionable, whether strict and impartial justice can be proved, from what we see of his dealings, to belong to the character of God. It seems less susceptible of satisfactory proof from reason, than some of the other attributes of the Deity. At least it is liable to objections which cannot be brought against his goodness or his mercy. I will endeavor, however, to show that these objections have less real force than at first view they might seem to possess.

The first objection that offers itself, is the promiscuous distribution of good and evil in this world, in which the consideration of different moral desert seems to be disregarded. If the vindication of the divine justice required proof of such a constitution of things, as should render immediate retribution to every man exactly according to his moral desert, the objection would indeed be insurmountable. But, in an extensive scheme, and especially in a pro-

gressive scheme, where remote effects are to be produced, where very distant events are intimately related, where purposes of moral discipline are to be effected, and multitudes of beings acting and reacting upon each other, are the instruments of good or evil to one another, — it must often happen that a very wrong judgment would be made of the principle or rule, which operates in the whole, by the partial view which can be taken from any single point. In many cases the final issue and general result of the whole must be very different from that which appears in any given part of the progress.

But the Justice of God does not require that he should adjust his distributions exactly according to the relative moral claims of men, even on the whole ; much less as it respects each particular portion of their being. It is sufficient to vindicate his justice if he does no wrong to any one of his creatures, although he should bestow on it fewer marks of his favor than on another, who had no higher claims of merit.

Nor does Justice, in the next place, demand that even the innocent and upright should be exempt from suffering. It is not incompatible even with high degrees and long continuance of suffering. So long as existence is on the whole a blessing, no wrong is done by the Creator in giving it, and he who receives it has no reasonable ground of complaint ; not even although for some definite period of his existence his suffering should exceed his enjoyment, if, on a balance of the whole, there be a preponderance of good. If it could be shown that any innocent and virtuous

being, by the necessity of its condition, were subjected to suffering which rendered its existence an evil on the whole, it would be impossible to vindicate the justice of the Deity in bringing it into being on such terms.

In proportion, then, as it can be made to appear probable, from the actual condition of human life, that there is in the lot of each a preponderance of good, this supposed objection to the divine justice will give place. How far there are such appearances will be the inquiry hereafter.

Is it consistent, it may be asked again, with the justice of God to make even guilty beings miserable on the whole? that is, to inflict upon them, as the punishment of sin, such degrees of suffering, or such continuance of it, that it would have been better for them not to have existed at all? Without entering fully into the discussion of this question now, it may be suggested, that there are suppositions, on the grounds of which it would be difficult to show that there would be any absolute incompatibility in such punishment. Thus, if man be a free being, placed under a just and reasonable law, with very high degrees of attainable happiness set before him, as the motive to a life of virtue, while the penalties annexed to disobedience are fairly made known, so that what he is to enjoy or to suffer is a matter of free choice, — who will say, when he has chosen the alternative of sin, and is subjected to the penalty, that any injustice is done? that he has any cause of complaint? Life and death, good and evil, reward and punishment, were set be-

fore him. Which he should receive depended on his own free choice. If then he chose and pursued the guilty course, and was involved in its consequences, can he reasonably make exceptions to the justice of the penalty, and say that his Maker has done him wrong in giving him being upon such conditions? This answer to be sure relates only to the objection so far as it respects the claim of the offending being; but it will meet the whole of the objection, if we further suppose, that the law of virtue which has been violated, is not a mere arbitrary ordinance, but necessary to the order and happiness of the universe, so that the general good required the punishment of the transgressor.

Another question touching the justice of God relates to those laws by which the consequences of the course of life, which a man pursues, fall not on himself only, but on his descendants and others connected with him, and his sins are visited with punishment upon his children.

But the force of this difficulty lies probably, in a great part, if not wholly, in our inability to see the whole of the case. Were there nothing further to be taken into the account but the suffering of one being, as the direct consequence of the actions of another, — without any regard to its own desert, without any provision for a compensation, and without any reference to a scheme of moral discipline for the trial and improvement of virtue, of which it is a part, — the difficulty might be insurmountable. But the observation, which has already been made, again

has place here. We can see in some cases, and can conceive in all, how important purposes of moral discipline, not otherwise to be effected, are brought about by this part of the divine scheme. Not only are the general purposes of discipline accomplished, together with particular individual influence, in high motives and strong inducements to shun a course, the pernicious consequences of which, it is foreseen, may be suffered by many, whose happiness is as dear to a man as his own; to the sufferer himself it may be a salutary lesson. The temporary evil to which he is subjected may bear no proportion to the benefits resulting to him, in preventing his following an example of such fatal tendency, and entering on a course of conduct which brings after it such a train of consequences. In the poverty, low condition, or bodily infirmity which he inherits from his parents, and which are the effects of their fault or neglect, you behold him as an innocent sufferer, and arraign at least the severity, if not the justice of providence, in visiting upon him the sins in which he had no participation; but could you see the whole of the case you might discover, that to these circumstances, in themselves undesirable, and apparently adverse, he may have owed all the virtues, prosperity, and happiness of life. He has learned by early experience the value of virtue, the fatal tendency of vice, and the obligation of a life of active and well directed exertion, on which, by the appointment of heaven, so much of the prosperity and comfort, and so many of the blessings of the human condition depend. Shall we question the

justice of an appointment in which we can sometimes perceive that there are, and always can see how there may be, benefits far more than sufficient to overbalance the evils that attend it?

Let us now proceed to inquire, what positive indications there are in ourselves, or in our experience of the conduct of divine providence, that justice is to be considered as one of the attributes of God. We find in our moral constitution that which might lead us to some apprehension at least of the attribute in question.

There is in our nature a strong natural sense of justice. As soon as we are capable of understanding the meaning of righteousness and equity, they are the objects of approbation. Injustice and wrong are the immediate objects of disapprobation and abhorrence. This original constitution of our nature was given us by Him who made us; and we can hardly admit a doubt of its giving us correct information as to the character of Him who has so formed us. It is hardly to be imagined that a being, regardless himself of justice, should have implanted so strong a sentiment of it in the breast of his creatures. "Shall mortal man be more just than God?"

This consideration is fortified by another intimately connected with it. The condition of human life is such, and the relations of men and their necessary intercourse, as to make this natural sense of justice exceedingly important to the wellbeing of the world, and the constant practice of righteousness indispensable to the social state. The scope for its exercise is

constant and universal ; confined to no age, or place, or rank, or condition. Multiplied as the relations of life are, dependent as we are on one another, without a regard to justice, and the general practice of righteousness, the affairs of the world could not go on. To secure a practical regard to that law of righteousness which thus seems to be written on the human heart, and prevent those violations of it which might arise from error, or selfishness, or passion, is the main design of all human government. Men may mistake what is right, from wrong or from imperfect views, or they may be disposed to do wrong, under the influence of the passions, or that perversion of the judgment into which the pursuit of a separate interest may sometimes lead them. To correct these evils, and secure the uniform respect for the law of rectitude, laws are framed, and all the institutions of society have it for their main purpose. Justice and equity are the basis of the compact by which men bind themselves together for the most common purposes of business. It is to enforce their observance, to secure men in their rights, and prevent them from doing wrong to one another, that larger associations are formed, communities are united together, the power of government is delegated, courts of justice are established, and tribunals erected. For similar purposes also, and from equal necessities, are those institutions and regulations which relate to the intercourse of nations with one another, and are intended to promote justice between them. All these provisions, to which mankind have resorted, have their foundation

in human nature, and the necessities of the human condition. They would not have existed but for those relations and interests, and that mutual dependence in which we are here placed, which make the claims of justice indispensable, and the calls to regard them continual.

Nor, however necessary, and reasonable, and useful, would their usefulness and their necessity have been discovered, and practically acknowledged, but for some correspondency in our moral nature, some natural feelings and dispositions, which lead to the approbation and the love of justice. In these combined circumstances, then, of our nature, and the condition, relations, and dependencies, in which we are placed, we have the declaration of our Maker in language the most unequivocal; what is the law He has given us, what the principle and the rule by which it is his will, the whole conduct of our life should be governed. And if such be the expressions of his will, can we mistake in our inference of the dispositions which dictated it? Can we doubt whether we may attribute as much excellence to the designer as to the design, to the Author as to the work? Can we doubt whether we may fairly infer the intentions of the Author from the character and manifest tendencies of the work?

But we are not left to the necessity of relying on deductions, as natural, direct, unexceptionable even as these. We have that which is still more direct, in our own experience and observation of the government of divine providence. All the evidences we can

discover of goodness and mercy, in the divine administration, are favorable at least to the supposition of its rectitude, if they do not actually go to prove it. Whatever shows the kindness of God to any of his creatures, is hardly reconcilable with the idea of a want of justice. On the other hand, we see nothing that indicates cruelty or caprice. In the operation of general laws, inequalities will appear; and though the general tendency be to a right result, irregularities will take place in the progress. Yet in every part and in every point of view, some marks of the design and tendency, which characterize the whole, will be seen.

We see in the general laws, by which the world is governed, a general tendency to a righteous issue. The exceptions in effect can usually be traced to counteracting causes, not like the rule permanent and universal, but temporary and partial. If we instance in an individual, how much does each one receive, as he goes along, of righteous retribution? How uniformly, and with comparatively how few exceptions, do industry, activity, and enterprise lead to success, while indolence and neglect end in disgrace and ruin! How seldom do true virtue and real worth fail of the respect that belongs to them, and of promoting the permanent interest and satisfaction of their possessor; and how rarely does it happen that manifest and atrocious guilt is not sooner or later visited with its desert! Yet sometimes you see the good struggling long with adversity, and the bad pressing on with the full tide of prosperity. And instances may occur, in

which it cannot be ascertained, that a righteous retribution takes place at all in the present life. No visible change is observed; events continue to proceed in the same course as they began. The good man sinks into his last rest without any cheering beams of light and outward good to solace him; and the sinner, with no loss, or affliction, or terror to disturb the peaceful calm of the evening of his days. We are not therefore allowed, with the light of nature alone, without that revelation which opens to us a life beyond the grave, to see the certain proofs of perfect and impartial justice in the Author of nature. We are allowed to see clearly only the beginning and some of the progress of a righteous administration; and enough to lead us to the apprehension, that in whatever instances, and in what degrees soever other results appear, they take place in the way of discipline, and may eventually, however unable we are at present to perceive how, contribute to the perfection of the great moral design. What we can observe in the treatment of individuals, we can see also in that which societies receive under the government of God. The scene presented is a mixed one of imperfect retribution, something of reward and punishment, and much of discipline. But there are general tendencies which cannot be mistaken, and which seldom fail, or are obstructed; and these are uniformly, and without exception, on the side of righteous retribution. There is no case in which the natural and original tendency of virtue is not on the whole favorable to human happiness, and that of vice the contrary. In the laws

which govern the lot of nations, and the retributions which they receive, the justice of heaven is sometimes signally manifested ; and usually are they such, that the pious and reflecting mind finds no difficulty in discerning a righteous providence.

Every part of the moral character of our Maker is a proper subject of imitation ; and no duty can be more clear than that of seeking the nearest resemblance of the Author of our being, in all that we are taught to revere and love in his character. The righteousness, which we learn from a view of his works to attribute to Him, is to be regarded as the law of our nature, and the rule of our conduct, prescribed to us in the most intelligible and affecting manner ; — which we cannot violate or neglect with impunity.

CHAPTER XX.

PROVIDENCE.

THE preserving care of God over all his creatures, and his providence ordering and disposing all that shall take place throughout the extent of his works, can hardly be doubted by him who acknowledges his being and perfections. The same facts and phenomena, which discover to us an intelligent Author of nature, prove also his sustaining hand and preserving care. This supreme intelligence, always active, always exerting its energy, is as necessary to account for things proceeding on in undisturbed order, and accomplishing the innumerable purposes which are accomplished, as it is to account for their being brought into existence at first. You believe that God exists, because the universe exists, which could not have brought itself into being. You must, for a similar and an equally strong reason, admit his constant activity and energy in preserving the order and directing the course of nature, and in executing those general laws, according to which all things take place. Since this, as much as the other, requires to be thus accounted for, and is, on any other supposition, an insolvable enigma.

So also the facts and appearances which suggest to us the Perfections of God, with equal clearness teach

us his Providence. Have we proofs that God is a Spirit, everywhere present, filling, surrounding, pervading all things; from whose knowledge nothing can be concealed? Have we proofs of his almighty Power, and that he is the Source of all the intelligence and all the power there is in the universe? Such a being can hardly be imagined to be an idle spectator of all that is going on in the vast compass of nature, which he fills. Activity enters into our very notion of a spiritual being. That activity may be supposed to be exerted, wherever it exists. It will be exerted, then, throughout the universe. But, if exerted at all, it must be *upon* the universe. Where else shall we look for the sustaining hand, the directing mind, and the all-governing will, which moves the whole?

If, especially, we take into consideration the Moral attributes of God, and recollect, that power, knowledge, and wisdom are united with perfect goodness, it will confirm us in the opinion, which other views had suggested. We shall easily believe, that the wise and beneficent laws of nature, and the kind provisions, which serve to advance the perfection, or to promote the happiness of the several orders of creatures, are his work. And although among the laws and the provisions of nature there be some, of which we do not readily perceive the wise design and benevolent tendency, we shall not hastily conclude, that they cannot be his work; but shall think it possible, at least, that they may have designs above our comprehension, and may tend to purposes beyond our foresight.

If, together with the Perfections of God, we take into our consideration, that he is the Creator of the universe, and the Father of all beings, the inference that he takes care of the universe, and provides for all creatures, is next to irresistible. “He laid, of old, the foundations of the earth, and established the ordinances of heaven.” But when he had done this, did he forsake his work, or put it into other hands, to do with it as they should please? Is it subject to any influence, to which he did not then subject it; is it exposed to any changes other than he then saw fit to expose it to by the circumstances in which he placed it? He appointed the relations in which all beings were to stand to the beings around them, and the dependence they should have on other things about them; whatever then, in the whole course of their being, is the result of those mutual relations and dependencies, should be referred to his providence, and his agency be acknowledged.

Again, God is the Creator of the universe, and the giver of life to all. He had doubtless some motive for such an exercise of his power and wisdom,—some design in view, some end to accomplish. Now whatever the motive might be,—whatever that end and design, did they cease when the work was finished? Can we conceive them not to have extended to its preservation and continuance? Suppose it were only the pleasure of contemplating the beauty, grandeur, variety, and order, which so admirable a scheme as that of the universe displays; were it not to be expected that the same motive would lead to

the continued exertion of the same power to preserve and perpetuate what it had thus designed and executed? But suppose a higher and nobler motive dictated the creation. Suppose that he who made all things was moved to it by benevolence; that he designed the communication of good; is it credible, that the motive ceased with the completion of the work? Is it credible that the benevolence, which suggested the scheme, should not afterwards preside over and direct its operation? Especially can it be believed, that the scheme itself remains in all the character originally impressed upon it; that the benevolence which prompted, the wisdom which contrived, and the power which executed, are also unimpaired; and yet that the great Creator, in whom they reside, is not concerned in that preserving care and controlling influence over the creation, by which it is made to answer its original design?

Again. It is the character of all created beings, to have an affection for their offspring, a regard for the production of their hands, the fruit of their invention or their labor. A human artist can never cease to feel an interest in the work, which with great expense of labor and thought he has brought to perfection. A human parent cherishes a fond affection for his children, has a lively concern for their prosperity, and will readily incur danger and expense for their good. Has the great architect of nature, he who planned and built all worlds, and made them convenient abodes for the beings for whom he designed them, has *He* left them without his care, and ceased to concern himself,

whether they continue to answer the purposes of their creation or not ; and whether they shall remain, the monuments of his skill and benevolent purposes, or be allowed to sink into disorder, decay, and ruin ? Has the great Father of the universe, the parent of all beings, abandoned to neglect the innumerable tribes of his creatures ? Does he make no provision for them ? Does he exercise no care over them ? Is he regardless alike of their conduct and their welfare, and neglectful of their condition in the world he has made and fitted up for their use ?

But we are not left to rest on arguments like these, however satisfactory they may be to us. We are not obliged to rely on what we may think it supposable, or credible, or probable that the Creator of the universe would do ; we have the knowledge of what he actually has done, and is constantly doing.

We appeal, in the first place, to what appears in the material creation. We see in the natural world all things performing without fail their appointed offices, and answering their destined purposes. By what power does this take place ? Is it by an intelligence of their own ? Is it by an energy of their own ? The effects which we witness are regular, uniform, and certain, and they take place according to certain laws. But when we speak of the 'laws of nature,' do we mean anything distinct from, or independent of the constant action of the Author of nature himself ? Do we mean a power or energy capable of carrying on the process of nature, without the inspection or superintendence of him by whom it was at first imparted ?

As well may we expect a mere constitution of human government, a code of laws, or a system of abstract principles of legislation, to produce a well organized and well regulated civil society without any judicial or executive body to superintend and enforce their execution. In the former case, as in the latter, it is not abstract principle, but active power, that produces the effect. The law only expresses the rule of action, it does not impart the activity. An apple falls to the ground, and a planet revolves in its orbit ; and each effect is produced according to the same law. But who does not know, that it is an invisible power that produces the effect ? The law only expresses the manner in which that power is exerted and that effect produced. This power does not belong to matter itself. The subjects in which it resides have no knowledge of it, and no liberty or choice in exercising it.

From the material world we rise to the contemplation of the vegetable creation, and the proofs of a directing and superintending care are still seen. View, to this end, the countless varieties of plants with which the earth is covered. Consider their different structure, growth, and properties ; their successive decay and reproduction ; the provision that is made for the uniformity and perpetuity of each species, while every individual of each kind is of short continuance, and in a state of constant change. Remark their important uses for food, for medicine, or for shelter for men, and for the animal tribes ; and will you doubt whether or not all this beauty and usefulness are under the direction of a superior intelligence ? Can

you fail to perceive the hand of God in purposes of wisdom and beneficence ?

In the part of creation which is endued with animal life, and the powers of sense and motion, new proofs of a superintending care are presented. We see it in ample provisions for the subsistence of all the living creatures that inhabit the earth, the air, and the waters. We see it in the never ceasing care with which the order originally established is preserved and perpetuated ; in the wonderful instinct by which each of the numberless tribes is distinctly marked, and separated, as it were, by an insurmountable barrier, from every other tribe ; never varying from its original impression, the same nature, composed of the same instincts, being transmitted down, unmixed, unimpaired, through a thousand ages and a thousand generations. The lion is the same bold and fierce monarch of the forest, that he is represented to have been three thousand years ago ; and the lamb, as it then was, is now, proverbially gentle and inoffensive. The cunning of the fox, the timidity of the hare, and the innocence and fidelity of the dove, which were the theme of eulogy, of reproach, or of satire in the days of Grecian fable, appear to have lost none of their character in the lapse of ages, and are the same after passing down through a thousand generations.

To what, again, but the same unfailing superintendence, shall we ascribe the fact, that the balance between the several families is so accurately adjusted and carefully preserved ; that the violent and rapacious among them are restrained from desolating the

earth ; that they multiply slowly, while the feeble, defenceless, and harmless, are rapid in their increase ; so that none is allowed to be lost, nor any to become disproportionately numerous and prevalent.

But we are chiefly interested in considering the divine government of the world, as it is exercised over the intelligent and moral part of it. Who sees it not in the admirable adjustment of the nature of man to the world in which he is placed, the objects by which he is surrounded, and the relations in which he stands to other beings ? Who can fail to discover its footsteps in tracing the series of events since man has lived on the earth ; in reviewing the progress of arts, refinement, and knowledge ; in following the steps by which the race of men has been gradually ascending in the scale of intellectual and moral perfection, succeeding generations advancing upon the improvements of their ancestors, rising to a capacity for higher attainments, unfolding new powers, and exploring new regions, in which to exercise them ; every age adding its own improvements to all preceding, and thus rendering the next capable of still further advancement ?

In this characteristic feature of the human kind, forming the most marked distinction between man and the mere animal world, — this improvable quality of the human intellect, by which the species is progressive, while the individuals that compose it are transitory and merely passing on in succession ; the pious and reflecting mind will delight to acknowledge the providence of God, who, projecting this whole scheme of improvement, laid in our nature the foundation,

and in the structure of our minds, and in the circumstances in which he placed us, provided the means for its execution.

There are other general views of divine providence, that can hardly escape our notice, and ought not to pass without regard and impression. Such are the general tendencies so visible in what we see of the moral world ; tendencies which cannot be mistaken, to the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice ; tendencies indeed often interrupted, often prevented from going into effect, often counteracted, but never reversed. The interruption is accidental, and from extrinsic causes, not inherent and natural. Such is the whole structure of human society. Such are the relations of domestic life, and the affections and the mutual interests by which we are bound to each other. Such are the various social relations and the satisfactions and comforts of which they are the constant and unfailing source. Such are the blessings of a civil community, and the order, and safety, and peace enjoyed under well constructed and well administered forms of human government.

As all the improvements in our social and domestic condition, the order and peace of families under domestic discipline, and the protection enjoyed under civil government, constitute a part of the divine government of the world, they are as such to be acknowledged in all their influence, whether favorable or adverse, on the human condition and character.

Will it be said, that all our blessings and most of our sufferings are connected with human exertions,

and result immediately or remotely from our own conduct and that of others, with whom we are connected ; and that this should weaken our faith in providence, and impair our sense of dependence on it ? Whence is it, I pray you, that we derive the power of making those exertions, on which our welfare depends ? Who has established the connexion between human endeavors and the ends they are to accomplish ? Who has given to man the foresight and solicitude about the future, which prompt him to labor, and care, and activity in providing, not only for present necessities, but for future exigences ?

Nor is it only man, endued with reason, that is furnished with this foresight, and prompted to make this provision for the future. We see it in numerous tribes of the animal race. The bee and the ant, from the days of Solomon, have been the subjects of eulogy, and proposed as examples of industry, foresight, and provident care. Who has taught them that a winter is approaching, when the present abundance will cease, — when they will have occasion for all the stores they can now provide, and when, if they provide them not, they must inevitably perish, and the race be extinct ? Who has admonished the bird of passage, when it is time to prepare for his flight to the milder regions of the south ; and again informs him of the returning spring, and that he may with safety wing his way once more to the climes he had so lately left ? Is it his own sagacity and foresight ? Who has taught the fishes to return without fail, at the appointed season, after traversing for many months the pathless

ocean ; — without a compass to guide them, to the same waters where they received their birth ?

Instances might be multiplied, which exhibit striking proofs of the providence of God, in the power he has given to living creatures to provide for themselves, and in the instinct by which they are prompted and directed in their use of it.

There are questions concerning providence which will require further consideration. Reserving them, let us consider what are the present duties of which our views so far lay the proper foundation. Can we fail, with due reflection, to acknowledge God in every thought, in every faculty, in every power of action, and in every capacity of enjoyment ? He is the author and the giver of every capacity, of every power, and every blessing. Are we safe from harm and danger ? He it is that is our shield and defence, to shelter us, to guard our dwelling, to watch over our sleep. Are we surrounded with blessings ? He provides for us the food that nourishes, the raiment that covers, the dwellings that shelter us. He gives us friends to cheer us, multiplies our social and domestic comforts, furnishes objects of gratification to delight our senses, and provides for us all the satisfactions of our intellectual and moral nature. Not a hope springs up in the breast to give present joy, nor a desire excites to activity, which he has not inspired. Are we in adversity, or peril, or fear ? Where but to the Common Parent, and Friend, and Protector of all shall we look for safety and comfort and hope ?

Let us look abroad and around us with unceasing

admiration, for all that we see is the work of God. Let us look up with devout and humble adoration of that power which superintends and directs all that takes place. Let us look back on the past with grateful and affectionate recollection, for all the good we have received is the gift of God. Let us submit to the present allotments of providence with entire resignation, and look before us and contemplate the future with steadfast faith and cheerful hope in that care which will never cease, in that power and goodness which will never fail.

CHAPTER XXI.

PROVIDENCE.

PROOFS of the government of Providence have been drawn from the divine perfections, from the consideration of God as the Creator of all things, and from our experience and observation of what actually takes place.

But the doctrine itself has not yet been very distinctly stated and clearly explained. It has been intimated in general, that it is over all, and extends to all things. And the proofs which have been alleged relate to it in this extent. The notions of some of the ancient philosophers on this subject were exceedingly loose, and unsupported by probability. Some of them admitted a directing and superintending care over the heavenly bodies, but denied that it extended to sublunary things; and maintained that affairs on this earth were allowed to go on at random. Others thought it not beneath the Supreme Sovereign of nature to concern himself in great events, and provide for the great and general interests of nations of men, and of the whole classes of the animal tribes; but that he could not be supposed to have a particular regard for the several individuals of which the nations and the tribes were composed.

Now with respect to the first of these, it has been

well observed, that if it be admitted that Providence regulates the heavenly bodies, for instance, the great luminaries, which regulate the seasons, form day and night, and communicate light and heat to the earth, and its inhabitants, it can hardly be said not to extend to the beings that inhabit the earth and other worlds. Whatever care is exercised over those is to be considered as a care over these, who are benefitted by their influence.

And with respect to the last, it is not easy to conceive how the whole, composed of numerous individuals, nations for example, are to be provided for, while each of the individuals, separately considered, is neglected ; or, how great events are subject to the government of providence, while it takes no cognizance of the innumerable small circumstances, on the exact succession and the minute concurrence of which the existence of those great events entirely depends. It would seem that the care of heaven over nations must imply its care over all the individuals of which those nations are composed ; and that the concern of providence in great events, implies its concern in the whole train of subordinate circumstances, by which they are brought about, the failure of any part of which must have prevented or altered the general result. The nearer and more closely we view the subject, the more satisfied shall we be, that there is no ground for any such distinction between a general and particular providence ; and that if we admit the one, we shall find similar and equally conclusive reasons for not denying the other.

It being settled then, that the minutest circumstances as well as the greatest events, — the falling of a sparrow as certainly as the revolution of a planet, is provided for in the great scheme of the divine government ; and that the interests of every individual, as surely as the destinies of the whole nation of which he makes a part, are under the superintending care of the Most High ; — the question next occurs, in what sense and in what manner this superintendence and direction are exercised. A complete answer to this question it may not be in our power to give ; but a satisfactory one is not remote nor difficult.

Our whole experience and observation show, that the principles and the manner of governing every different part of the creation and order of beings is adapted to its nature. The material world is governed by physical laws. These operate with uniformity and exactness ; produce everywhere and always the same effects under similar circumstances ; and whether motion or rest, continuance and sameness, or change of state and relations take place, it is by a power in which the material substance itself has no agency and no choice, and may therefore be considered, and cannot be distinguished from, the immediate agency of God. No other agency is perceived, or can be imagined. It is not so when we come to contemplate living beings, capable of action and motion. In what relates to them the agency of God is less immediate and direct, and is exercised in another manner, by other laws, and for other ends. Whatever powers they have are the original gift of God. For their

continuance they are entirely and immediately dependent on him. So far also as they are material beings, they are subjected to physical laws, which are necessary and irresistible. But so far as they are sensible, intelligent, and active beings, they are governed by different laws. The animal races have active powers, which are put in motion and directed to accomplish the purposes of providence, by passions, affections, and appetites. These are excited by external objects, so that they are made to accomplish the purposes of God by the disposition that is given to those external objects. Men have higher powers, are more exempt from the laws of physical nature, and have more freedom in the choice of actions. If their intellectual faculties are not wholly distinct in their nature, they have a larger range, are far more perfect, and give them degrees of power and of freedom which are not possessed by the animal races. Yet it is not such, as to make them in any proper sense independent and self-directed, either in their actions or in their state. We are neither impelled, like inanimate matter, to a certain invariable course, in which we have no choice; nor like the animal tribes, are we left to follow the mere impulse of the appetites and the passions. We are capable of being influenced by other motives. We can deliberate, examine, and estimate the relative value of motives. We can compare the present with the future, and understand the difference between a small present advantage and a greater future good. Still further, we can discern the relation which our actions may have to other beings,

the influence they may have upon their actions or their condition, and hence will they appear to us in a new character, as right or wrong, suitable or unsuitable to be performed ; deserving of censure or meriting approbation. Our motives then are not single and uniform, but various, and often operating in direct opposition to each other at the same time.

In what manner, then, and in what sense is the conduct and the condition of such beings subject to the direction and control of providence ? Can it be without infringement of that freedom which the exercise of such powers implies ? Can it be without destroying accountableness and moral desert, which such a nature seems also to imply ?

So far as respects the disposition of things about us according to the general laws of the material world, it will hardly be pretended, that human liberty is invaded, or that we cease to be answerable for our actions. The mere possession of abundance, for example, will surely not be pleaded as an excuse for intemperate excess, while there are the inducements of reason, and the perception of moral distinctions to balance the demands of appetite. Opportunity will not be thought an apology for vicious indulgence. Nor will you pretend that your moral freedom is violated, or your power to do right taken from you, when the situation in which you are placed is such, as makes it your present apparent interest to do what your heart will condemn as wrong.

Under such circumstances, he who yields to temptation, and he who resists it, acts with the same free-

dom; each is alike accountable for the course he chooses; and yet each may in the same degree be instrumental in accomplishing purposes of providence. Most important designs of providence were to be brought about by that series of transactions and events, which issued in settling the family of Jácob in the land of Egypt. Each of them alike was necessary to bring about that event, and accordingly made a part of the scheme of providence.

In order to Joseph's being raised to that power and trust in the court of Pharaoh, by which he was to be the instrument of Providence in saving many lives, and by which things were to be put in train for the accomplishment of the vast designs of heaven in succeeding ages, the crimes as well as the virtues of the several actors, were equally necessary. The harsh, and cruel, and unrelenting spirit of the brethren of Joseph, and the seductive attempts of the wife of Potiphar, made a no less essential part of the series of circumstances, which were to issue in the accomplishment of those great designs, than did the piety and gentleness, the inflexible integrity, and unyielding virtue of that extraordinary young man.

But was the freedom with which they acted affected at all by their instrumentality in accomplishing the purposes of heaven? They, as well as he, acted without restraint and without compulsion, in their own proper character. To them, as well as to him, the different motives of action were presented, and they were alike at liberty to choose the higher and reject the inferior, or to follow the inferior and to set aside

the higher consideration. It was not that one motive of action was proposed to them, and another and different one to him; all the considerations which appertained to the case were alike open to both. Each had before him, together with the inducements to a wrong and wicked deed, the reasons for a right and virtuous act. Did they yield to the instigations of jealousy at the deeper hold their brother had gained in the affections of their father, and did they therefore resolve to revenge themselves on him for that superiority of virtue and kindness of temper, by which he had gained the ascendancy in the affections of the venerable patriarch? And why was not he also the victim in the day of temptation, when, beside the inducement to sin, the refusal was attended with danger, the course of purity and integrity was encompassed with perils, exposure to certain suffering, and to the imminent risk of losing every prospect of life, and sacrificing life itself to the inflamed resentments of a mortified and disappointed tempter? But the higher and nobler considerations, which piety, conscience, and the demands of justice suggested to him, prevailed. To fortify his virtue, he called to its support a sense of the presence and inspection of God, and the fidelity he owed to his master; and he no longer hesitated in the choice he should make. But were there no considerations which an equal fidelity and good intention to make a right use of the circumstances in which they were placed, would have suggested to the brethren of Joseph? Where were the common sentiments of humanity, which revolt at inflicting suffering on the

innocent and unoffending? — where the ties of domestic affection, which bind together so strongly those, who are of the same blood? — where that filial piety, which should have prevented them from perpetrating a deed which must deprive a venerable parent of the support and solace of declining years, and was likely to “bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave?” — where, in fine, their piety to God, and sense of religion, that they should deliberately violate the first principles of that nature he had given them, and the dearest obligations of the relations in which he had placed them? Were they absolved from their accountableness to the moral Governor of the world in the breach of his laws, because he had provided that their breach, as well as their observance, should with equal certainty fulfil his designs? Not so did they reason when in their perplexity and distress the guilty deed was brought to their recollection. “We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.”

It has been shown, that in the assertion, that the providence of God extends to all things, is to be understood, that the sensitive, intellectual, and moral, as well as the material world, are under his superintendence and direction; but that each is governed by laws suited to its nature, and to the powers both of action and perception with which it is endued.

I would also observe, that it is concerned in the evils as well as the blessings of life. The meaning is,

we are not indebted to God for that only which we call good, and to consider what we call evil as brought upon us by a different and opposite power. The same power is concerned in both, and both alike are instruments in accomplishing his wise and good designs. "I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things." With this language of Scripture our best reflections on the constitution of nature and the course of events fully accord. We assent to its justice, when we see how good and evil in all their forms are so connected together, so spring from the same causes, are so constantly and reciprocally produced by, and produce each other, that they clearly belong to the same scheme, and constitute parts of the same government.

Our conviction is strengthened when we remark what has before been observed in vindicating the goodness of God in permitting evil; that liability to evil is inseparable from every part of our original constitution. The same senses, which make us capable of pleasure, expose us also to pain; and if the susceptibility of suffering be taken away, it is certain that of enjoying cannot remain. The same is true also of every object and every event. What gives pleasure at one time may destroy it at another. What contributes to the safety and comfort of one man, may at the same time bring danger and destruction to another. When, therefore, we acknowledge our blessings as the gift of God, we are to receive evils as his infliction. And we may observe, what has been observed

before, and it will not be wholly useless to repeat, that most of the evils of life are either in their natural tendency and usual effects, in some way beneficial, or may be made so by our manner of improving them. How much do difficulties in life, dangers to be encountered, and obstacles to be overcome, pains to be borne, and disappointments to be endured, serve to strengthen the character, give vigor to the faculties, and opportunity for some of the nobler virtues! Without the admonition of pain, how often should we be exposed to unseen destruction! Without the passion of fear, what would lead us to those habits of precaution and care to guard against danger, which are our safety? Without that principle of sympathy, which disposes us to share in the distresses of others, and gives us a lively and painful fellow-feeling for all they suffer, should we not lose in a great degree our disposition to kindness and mutual assistance, and with it all the satisfactions of benevolence, and the self-approbation that follows deeds of kindness and humanity? Yet pain is in itself an evil, and fear and pity are in themselves painful passions, and, separate from these tendencies, undesirable.

We may be benefitted by our manner of improving evils. If we consider them as sent by God, regard them as a part of the discipline he has appointed for us, acknowledge his hand in them, and with humble and cheerful resignation submit to his disposal, and endeavor to learn and to practise the lessons they teach, they may be the means of producing in us the

most desirable moral effects, and qualifying us for being the subjects of higher and more unmingled blessings.

I remark again, that the providence of God is carried on by general laws, not by single insulated acts; and that these general laws he can make to effect his particular purposes. When, in the case lately mentioned, the great designs of heaven required that the son of a shepherd in the distant country of Canaan should be made the prime minister of Egypt, no interruption of the physical laws of nature, and no infraction of the moral constitution of man, were required to bring it about. Good men and bad men were employed as the instruments; but it was in freely acting out their own characters and dispositions, without any restraint on their liberty, or control of their actions.

But though usually this is the case, it may not be so always. When the purposes of heaven require it either for instruction, or conviction, or impression, the general laws of the universe may unquestionably be interrupted, or violated, or suspended, by the same power which established them. That cases might occur in which this would be expedient, and actually take place, is as consentaneous to our sober reason, as it is to the declarations of revelation that such instances have actually occurred. At the same time, that they would not be frequently repeated, not on common occasions, or for indifferent purposes, but only on the most momentous, when the highest interests of men were concerned, and purposes were to be accomplished, which required the visible interposition of the

Author and Lord of nature, is not less the dictate of reason.

I observe, finally, that in the administration of providence, the instrumentality of men makes an important part. This instrumentality, this influence of each upon all, and of all upon each, this incessant action and reaction in all directions, and through the whole extent of human society, — witnessed, as it is, in early education, in domestic discipline, in civil government, in all the social relations, in all the occupations of life, in all the transactions of business and pursuits of interest or pleasure,—the whole of this makes up a system so extensive, so complicated, so interwoven, so intangled, that with our limited faculties and the short distance to which we can see, it is impossible for us to trace its windings and understand its bearings. But shall we conclude because it is inexplicable to us, it must be so also to Him, who sees and knows all things? because it is unmanageable to us, He cannot bend it to his purposes, who can do all things? The very circumstances, which make it incomprehensible by us, are those which make it the fittest for the purposes of an Omniscient and Almighty Being. The more extensive is the scheme, and the more numerous, various, and unseen are the relations of its parts, and their mutual influence on each other, the more easy is it for Him, who can see and understand the whole, to accomplish all his purposes in them and by them, without disturbing the order he has established among them, or interfering with the free exercise of the powers he has imparted to them.

CHAPTER XXII.

RETRIBUTION.

OUR next inquiry relates to the doctrine of Retribution. Is it a doctrine within the reach of him who has only the Light of Nature for his guide, and who can reason only from what is presented to his observation and experience in this world and the present life? The question may be involved in some doubt ; for in order to settle it to his satisfaction, he must derive his conviction, either, 1. From proofs of an equal providence in the distribution of the present life, rendering to men here according to their desert, or, 2. From satisfactory proofs of a future life, when a remedy will be provided for the inequalities of the present.

Let us then attend to the first of these questions, and see whether the distributions of the present life be such as to make it certain that there “is a reward for the righteous.”

It will not suffice for this purpose to make out the proof, (which unquestionably may be done with great clearness and fulness,) that the Author of nature has expressed, in our moral constitution, his approbation of virtue and abhorrence of vice, and in the constitution of things and the tendencies of actions, has established a general connexion between virtue and happiness, and between vice and misery. It must be

shown that these tendencies are universal in their actual effect, and extend to all particular cases. Now that such is the constitution of things, that truth, justice, temperance, and charity have a tendency to promote human happiness, and that actions contrary to these have the opposite tendency, will not be questioned. But we know too that this general tendency may be counteracted; we perceive that it often is counteracted. In order that the natural tendencies of any of the virtues should go into full effect in all cases, there must be a concurrence of other circumstances; which not unfrequently fails. For example, one man's virtue is liable to be counteracted by the want of it in others; so that in the actual condition of things, it cannot with certainty be pronounced that he who practises virtue shall in this world receive the full reward of virtue. It may actually be according to the experience of the preacher of Israel,—That “there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked, and again wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous.”

In their natural tendency the virtues are promotive of human happiness. This tendency is uniform and unvarying. It is never by their own direct influence that the effect fails, or that the contrary effect is produced. Yet how often, notwithstanding, is the contrary effect actually produced! How often does it happen, that sincerity and truth make him who is bound by them the easy dupe of treachery and deceit, and integrity fall a victim to rapacity and in-

justice! How often does cunning knavery triumph over honest simplicity, and bold and shameless falsehood gain credit and obtain its end, while modest and cautious truth is abashed, and even the object of suspicion! How often does the whole natural order of things seem, as in the days of the prophet, to be so perverted, "that he who departeth from evil," instead of finding safety and peace, actually "maketh himself a prey!" — a prey to the selfish, the violent, and the rapacious.

But this is a partial view of the subject. Any conclusions derived only from the distributions of external things, must be of little value, because they are drawn from the false position, that external prosperity is the proper reward of virtue. It may be conceded, that external prosperity is not so certainly the reward of virtue as to furnish a clear sanction and adequate motive, and yet that such a sanction and motive is found in the internal peace and satisfaction which it gives.

This was the doctrine maintained in one of the schools of ancient philosophy. The masters of that school taught the self-sufficiency of virtue, that is, its independence of all external circumstances; and that it brings with it an adequate reward, which cannot be affected by those circumstances, whatever they may be; the good man being fully satisfied in the consciousness of his own rectitude, and incapable of receiving any injury or suffering from without. This doctrine is certainly of an elevated character, and what one would gladly find reason for believing to be true. In

the contempt of pain and all external evils, there is a dignity which commands our reverence ; and could it be clearly shown, that the good man feels and manifests this superiority to the natural evils of life, so that to him they are no evils ; that, indifferent to bodily sensation, and to external injuries, he can be happy in the midst of all that is usually most dreaded and shunned by men, because virtue is itself happiness, — the sanction of virtue would be complete.

But how far is this self-sufficiency of virtue an evident truth ? That it is so to a certain degree, is an undoubted fact. No one will call in question the general tendency of virtue to give peace within. An approving conscience is more than a compensation for many of the deficiencies, and for many of the injuries of fortune ; and the good man in any adversity is an object of envy compared with the sinner in similar adversity. This is clear and unquestionable.

But this comes far short of the purpose in question. Not only must the good man have the advantage of the sinner, in similar external circumstances. He must be happier in the most adverse circumstances, than the other in the most prosperous. For “the wise, or virtuous man,” to adopt the language of the Roman philosopher, in his account of this system, “suppose him to be blind, infirm, laboring under the most grievous distemper, banished from his country, bereaved of his children, or friends, in indigence, tortured upon the rack, is in that instance, and in those circumstances, not only happy, but happy in the highest degree.”

How different from this was the philosophy of Paul, of the other apostles, and of the martyrs of our Lord ! Readily and cheerfully as they submitted to the severe trials to which their Christian profession exposed them, it never came into their thoughts that they were to be regarded as no evils. Nor did they pretend, that their only support under them was derived from the consciousness of integrity. Their highest support was drawn from another source. They were enabled to rejoice in tribulation, and to be patient and cheerful under persecution, not because they were insensible to pain or regarded it with indifference ; but because they believed in the promise of a future life. Their language was, " If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable." It was " in hope of the glory of God, in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, had promised," that they were enabled to rejoice in their trials, and to triumph in death.

But whatever philosophy may teach, there are certainly human sufferings in which the consciousness of guilt has no part ; from which innocence and rectitude are no security. Not to mention innumerable physical sufferings to which the human frame is subject, and numberless sources of sorrow and regret, which no virtue can prevent, what shall we say of him, whose lot is to become actually the victim of his own virtue, — to fall a martyr to truth, to righteousness, and to exertions in the cause of benevolence ?

How many in all ages have been permitted, in the providence of God, thus to suffer and to die ! And

if this life be the whole of our being, and there be no future compensation for present inequalities, — what is there to assure us, that He is a lover of virtue, who thus permits it to be subjected to irremediable suffering?

As respects the question, how far virtue receives its reward in the present life, and sin its desert, the true state of the case seems to be this. — There is unquestionably a general tendency of virtue to promote human happiness both external and internal. And it is as invariable and as great, as it has been represented to be. So great and so certain is it, that were virtue practised universally, and without mixture, its effects would also be universal and unfailing. But its effects are in fact to a great degree prevented, partly by the mixture of imperfection, and the alloy of folly, of error, and of sin, with which it is connected in even the best men; and partly by the vices of others, and the general state of the world. And besides both these, there are further real sufferings incident to our condition as frail and mortal beings, and entirely independent of all consideration of moral desert. So far is this true, as respects external condition, that all will confess, that virtue is sometimes coupled with every species of calamity, and vice, with high degrees of prosperity.

Nor does even the peace of the mind always follow the purity and uprightness of the heart. It is indeed a fact that will not be controverted, that neither piety, purity, nor benevolence, is a security against the keenest suffering from guilt, in which it has no partici-

pation, and from circumstances, over which it has no control. Does the good man suffer nothing, when he mourns over the folly and perverseness of the wicked, and foresees the mischief that must come upon them? Does his heart never sink within him under the pressure of personal calamities, in deep affliction, from unrequited friendship, from unsuccessful labor, or from disappointed hope? Can he be insensible to sufferings of his dearest friends, which he is unable to relieve; or witness the ingratitude and profligacy of his children, and the ruin that awaits them, without deep-felt anguish, — though sensible of no just cause of self-reproach for the former, nor conscious of any criminal negligence in failing to ward off the latter?

If the retributions of the present life be exactly adjusted to good and ill desert, why are innocence and worth so often the victims of envy and malice, and compelled to shrink, like conscious guilt, from the eye of the world; while successful perfidy seems to enjoy the good opinion of the world, and all the advantages of virtue? And how is it, also, that sometimes the man of purity of heart and a tender conscience, feels none of the cheering influences of innocence and virtue; but is delivered over to the terrors of superstition and the anguish of despair, from false notions of himself and of the God he worships, filled with ceaseless self-reproach and dread, with remorse for guilt he has never incurred, and dread of that wrath, which the hardened and voluntary sinner only has reason to fear; while the bold transgressor discovers neither remorse for the past, nor

concern about the future, and pursues his guilty course undisturbed alike by a feeling of compassion for the wretched, or a fear of the righteous judgment of Heaven?

There are some cases, at least, in which men seem to be made miserable in proportion as they have cultivated great tenderness of conscience, and an exquisite sense of right and wrong; while those have relieved themselves from this kind of suffering, who, by long indulgence in vice and resistance of the monitor within, have lost their moral sensibility, and their conscience, to use the expressive language of inspiration, "is seared with a hot iron." "A wounded spirit who can bear?" But the deepest wounds, inflicted on the spirit of man, are far from implying certainly the deepest guilt; and they may be inflicted, where there is great purity and moral worth. On the other hand, among the greatest earthly blessings is a cheerful spirit, a heart at ease, a mind satisfied with itself. But how far is this from being a certain attendant upon innocence and virtue, though nothing would seem more properly to belong to them! How often does this happy state spring from nothing more than the peculiar temperament of the body, or favorable circumstances with which the moral state of the soul has nothing to do? And shall we not sometimes find it to be the mere result of that thoughtlessness, which is insusceptible of deep impressions, or of that hardness of heart, which is the effect of habitual vice, which has banished sober reflection, and has set conscience itself at defiance?

We must look then for the proper sanction of religion, further than to the distributions of this life. We must be satisfied that men are appointed to live again after death, and that the future life will be a state of righteous retribution. What grounds are there for this hope and expectation from the light of nature?

CHAPTER XXIII.

RETRIBUTION. A FUTURE LIFE.

It is certain, that, at first view, the extent of human life seems to be the whole of human existence. The event of death, which closes the one, seems also to terminate the other; and it is only by views and reflections, which, to say the least, are not obvious, that we are led to think otherwise.

Now what are the views and reflections, which, though not obvious, are yet within the reach of one, who thinks much and deeply on the subject, that will be sufficient to remove this first impression?

I. Is there anything that we know of the nature of the soul itself, that would lead us to the thought of its surviving the death of the body, and of its continuing to possess its powers of thought, perception, activity, and capacity for enjoyment and suffering, when separated from the body? or of recovering them by being reunited to it, after having been separated?

All that we know of mind and of body consists in their respective properties and powers. And these seem to be entirely distinct, and to have no necessary connexion with each other. All those that belong to body we know can exist together, independent of any of those which we attribute to mind; and there is nothing that should lead us to doubt the possibility of

those belonging to mind, existing independent of those of body. In ourselves we find them existing together. But there is nothing to render it incredible, that there may be other beings purely intellectual and spiritual, as well as, what we know to be the fact, simply corporeal. Now the fact, that perception, thought, memory, will, and all the attributes and functions of mind seem not to be the result of any bodily organization, leads to the thought, that they may belong to another substance distinct from body, not material, un compounded, indivisible, and accordingly not like the body corruptible and liable to be dissolved and perish at the dissolution of the body; but capable of surviving that event, and of continuing to act after the organization of the material system is destroyed.

Thus far then we find some grounds for the belief, that the event, which reduces the material frame to dissolution, may not be the destruction of the soul. But this is all. It furnishes no positive proof on the subject. It only shows, that it is not impossible, absurd, or incredible.

There is a consideration closely connected with this, that serves, at least in some degree, to strengthen the presumption. I mean the nature of those faculties. They are all such, as indicate essential activity. And while they are admirably suited to the human condition, and the relations and wants of man in this life; they yet seem, in their largeness and their comprehension, embracing as they do the vast and the minute, the distant and the near, what is material and what is spiritual, the past, the present, and the future,

to be greatly disproportioned to the present condition of man, and the short term of the present life; to be better suited to a permanent and more exalted being; and thus they furnish some additional ground of hope, that a being thus endowed is actually intended for such a state, a state corresponding to the largeness of those faculties, and furnishing that opportunity, which the present life does not, for their entire development and exercise.

II. Whatever weight may be justly allowed to the considerations, which have now been suggested; they will receive some additional force from the further consideration of the strong Desire of Immortality implanted in our nature. We know not any other instance, in which the Author of nature has given to any of his creatures a faculty, which was to be of no use, a desire, having no object answering to it, or a hope and expectation, where no provision is made for its gratification. All other creatures are adapted to the state in which they are placed, by having such faculties only as fit them for the condition and the duration of the life for which they are designed. No foresight of the future is given them to torment them with the dread of inevitable evil, or to disappoint them with the hope of imaginary or impossible good. They have, for instance, none of that dread of death, which would be of no use to them. Their hopes, their fears, and their foresight are all suited to the life, to which they are destined. But the same cannot be said of man, if his existence terminates at death. He has a foresight and dread of death, which are of great use to

him, if he is to live again after death, as they excite him to live now with reference to a future life; and especially is this a wise and kind provision, viewed in connexion with his accountableness as a moral being; but which otherwise serve no purpose but to fill him with useless fears, and delude him with groundless hopes.

III. This consideration is closely connected with another.

As man is the only inhabitant of this earth that is endowed with an extensive foresight, so as to feel an interest in anything beyond the present life; so he is the only one, that is capable of being influenced in the conduct of life by motives drawn from the hopes and fears of the world to come. We infer from this, with some degree of confidence, that it was the design of the Author of his frame, that he should be thus governed; and it seems utterly incredible, that he should be designed, in the very constitution of his nature, to act, in his most important interest, under the influence of a motive, which has no foundation in truth and reality.

Besides, man is a moral being, capable of merit or demerit, and conscious of deserving well or ill for his actions. Previous to the knowledge of any positive law, or prescribed rule of life, he is in a high and important sense a law to himself. This perception of moral differences, and consciousness of moral desert, not only gives present pleasure or pain, and excites self-complacency, or self-condemnation, but it also inspires hope and fear, the expectation of reward and

the dread of punishment. Now is it credible, that the Author of his being should have formed him to be so influenced and governed, had he not been actually designed for a state of future retribution, when the sentence, which he now passes upon himself shall be confirmed, and the hopes and fears, which he now entertains, shall be realized?

IV. The Improvable character of the human mind, and of all its faculties, is another consideration, which gives credibility to the thought of a future life.

To every other creature, of which we have any knowledge, faculties are given, which are only adapted to a mortal state; faculties, which soon arrive to their perfection, having limits assigned them, beyond which they can never pass. But to man, no such limits are prescribed. We know of no degree of intellectual improvement, beyond which he is not permitted to pass. The more his intellectual powers are improved, the more capable do they become of further improvement. The higher he ascends, the easier does he find it to rise still higher. The species also, as well as the individual, is capable of constant advancement, as far as we yet know, without limits. The acquisitions of one age are transmitted to another, and serve as a basis for the next to build upon; so that each generation of men may commence its career under better advantages than the preceding. It may set out at the point at which the preceding closed its course. Yet in how small a proportion of our race, do we find these advantages, by which we are thus distinguished, improved with any good degree of fidelity and success!

How many are there, who, with faculties by which they are allied to angels, in actual attainments scarcely rise above the beasts that perish ! And the few, who are faithful to cultivate them in the best manner, are able, in this short life, to make but a small advance toward that perfection, for which they seem by their natural endowments intended. Those, who have been the most faithful and the most successful in the pursuit of knowledge, instead of meeting with limits to stop them, have found the regions yet unexplored to enlarge and widen, as they have proceeded on ; so that, at the end of their career, they have seen a far more extensive field before them, than they have left behind, or than they had any conception of at the time they commenced it.

Now does it correspond with the experience we have of the divine economy in other dispensations, thus to bestow faculties, which, in a large proportion of instances, are to be of little or no use to their possessors, and in no instance to be brought to the perfection of which they are capable, for want of sufficient time and opportunity for the purpose ? Is it not a more credible supposition, that this living, active principle, the intellectual and moral being, will survive the dissolution of the body, with which it is now connected, and go on by a perpetual progress to the perfection and felicity for which it seems by the constitution of its nature designed ?

V. But the considerations, which give the greatest satisfaction and confidence to the mind on this subject, are those of a moral nature. They are drawn from

the contemplation of man as a moral and accountable being, of God as a righteous moral governor, and the imperfect degree in which the moral government of God is administered in this world, as far as we can see.

Now we are all conscious of those capacities, and of that moral liberty, which makes us the proper subjects of a moral government; and accordingly of deserving well or ill of our Maker. And it is equally clear, that there are many indications of a reference to the good or ill desert of men in the distributions of the present life. Yet there is withal confessedly so much that is promiscuous, and cannot be seen to have any reference to men's desert, that from the distributions of this life only the evidence of a righteous moral government would be imperfect. A hope then is excited in the good man, and a fear in the wicked, that what is not done here will be done hereafter. The one is encouraged to perseverance in virtue, the other is restrained in the course of vice. The one is filled with serenity and resignation in the calamities of life, the other is rendered uneasy in the most prosperous condition by the fearful apprehension what the end shall be.

I have mentioned some of the chief grounds, upon which, without a revelation, men might be led to the hope of a future life. To us, who have the light of the Gospel thrown upon this subject, they come with great weight to confirm and give credibility to its explicit declarations. But shall we find them equally satisfactory and convincing to those, who have nothing

else but the mere deductions of human reason, upon which to rest the hope of immortality? How few minds are there, in the first place, so cultivated and accustomed to abstract speculations, as to be able to comprehend any reasoning, which depends wholly on the different nature and properties of body and spirit! However conclusive the argument from this topic might be, to those who were capable of fully comprehending it, to the bulk of men, conversant only, or chiefly, with material or sensible objects, they must be almost wholly unintelligible. They can have little conception of a spiritual substance, as distinct from that which is material, or how the immortality of the soul is affected by its being material or immaterial.

And the wisest and the most learned,—what does he know of the essence of the soul? and how little can he explain or comprehend of the dependence and mutual influence of the soul and body upon each other! So intimately does he find them connected together, that he will find it not easy to say, how much of the activity, or the disposition of the one may result from the constitution and temperament of the other; or whether it be possible for either of them, especially the former, to exist without its companion.

Such, also, is the manner, in which the dissolution of the body usually takes place, as to give no indication, to common observation, that anything survives it. As the faculties of the mind have kept pace with the organs of the body in their growth, till they came to their maturity, so do they not unfrequently appear to grow old, become decrepit, and decay together.

So generally indeed does the gradual decay of the intellectual powers in old age correspond with that of the bodily organs, that the dissolution of the latter seems to him, who has only the light of nature and experience, to bring with it the extinction of the former.

Besides this apparently entire dependence of the mind upon the body, it seems also to be dependent on its peculiar organization and temperament. Now if a derangement of the animal system by disease or accident is capable of producing the most important change in the intellectual,—even of effecting a temporary suspension of its functions,—what is to be expected from the final destruction of the former, but the total extinction of the latter?

Such considerations as these, together with the total darkness, which covers the future world, make the belief of its existence difficult to him, who has no instructions in it but those of reason. They render it indeed a subject peculiarly proper for divine instruction; far more suitable to exercise that faith, “which is the evidence of things not seen,” than to employ that abstract reasoning, which can bring but very imperfectly to view, what is not an object of our senses.

The argument drawn from the moral character of God, and the unequal distributions of the present life, is certainly more intelligible, and more satisfactory. Yet this is also attended with its difficulties. Its whole force depends on the previous proof of the moral attributes of God, and an essential part of that proof lies in the very doctrine in question. To him,

who has only the light of nature, it is impossible to vindicate the divine character, but by assuming a future life, when present inequalities shall be rectified. The doctrine of a future life of righteous retribution makes as essential a part of the proof of the moral perfection of God, as the consideration of his attributes does of a future life. As each, therefore, is essential to the proof of the other, the force of the argument on both sides is diminished. For the reasoning, so far as relates to this argument, proceeds in a circle, and the mind is left in a degree of suspense, incapable of comprehending the measures and the ends of the divine administration. It discovers and can comprehend enough to raise in all some feeble hope, in serious minds, a faith sufficient for all practical purposes ; but to none can it give that complete satisfaction, which removes all doubts and fears. It still feels the want of clearer light, and can only be satisfied with that which comes from "the Father of Lights."

What then is our conclusion on the whole ? It is not that the light of nature is nothing, or her imperfect information of no value, on this subject, so interesting to our feelings and our hopes. Nor yet, that it is so clear and so full, as to preclude the want of all further information. We are rather taught how to value that clearer light, which shines upon us in the gospel of Jesus Christ ; to bring life and immortality to light.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DOCTRINE OF A FUTURE LIFE NOT THE
DISCOVERY OF PHILOSOPHY.

THE doctrine of a Future Life, with scarcely any exception, has in some form made a part of the popular religion in all countries before the age of learning and philosophy ; but with the introduction and advancement of these has come the age of skepticism on the subject. The proper use of this fact is, not to lessen our opinion of the credibility of the doctrine or of its evidence, but to show, that it probably was not the discovery of human reason, — but is to be referred to some other origin.

The most ancient philosophers speak of a future life as a doctrine familiarly known in their times ; not reasoned out by them, but handed down to them by tradition from remote ages, and the origin of which was unknown. Cicero,* speaking of some of the earliest philosophers, as teaching the immortality of the soul, asserts that the doctrine was not *then* new, but was held long before by the inhabitants of all nations, barbarous and civilized, ignorant and enlightened ; and that the farther you go back toward the origin of the human race, the nearer will you ap-

* Tusc. In. L. I. c. 12.

proach to the purity and perfection of the original doctrine, — the remotest ancestors of the human race being the most likely to have been in possession of the pure and unadulterated truth. These observations of the Roman philosopher are the reverse of what they must have been, had he regarded it as a truth, which men had arrived at by philosophical inquiry. But how consonant do we find them to the representations in the Jewish Scriptures ; and how favorable to the opinion, that the doctrine in question, prevailing as it has done in all nations and ages, — and most universally received, and with the firmest faith, where least enlightened by human science, — is the fruit of Divine instruction, and not of human research, — the remains of an original revelation, transmitted down in different nations, with various mixture, and in different degrees of perfection.

It appears to have been what the earliest of the ancient sages *found* in the world, — not what they *introduced* into it. It could not have been their invention or discovery, for it existed and was known before their time. They were surely well enough disposed to lay claim to whatever actually belonged to them. They cannot be suspected of a willingness to give to others, who had lived before them, the honor of discoveries which they had made themselves ; yet we never find any one of them claiming the merit of the first discovery, but uniformly speaking of “ the immortality of the soul, the punishments to which it is liable after being disengaged from the body, and the happiness provided for good men after death, as an ancient

opinion, handed down from infinite ages, and the author of which was unknown."

There is another consideration which leads toward the same conclusion. It is this ; that heathen philosophers, in the most enlightened ages, have in general either rejected the doctrine entirely, and treated it as a mere vulgar opinion, or have been skeptical on the subject ; or else, if they have professed to hold it at all, have explained it in such a manner as to impair its value, by not comprehending in their notion of a future life that of its being a state of righteous retribution.

In the most enlightened period, for example, of the Grecian history, there were many, besides the followers of Epicurus, who rejected the doctrine of a future life. The same was the case also, in the most flourishing period of Roman learning. With them, too, the most enlightened age was at the same time the most wealthy, the most voluptuous, and the most distinguished for looseness of opinion and principle, and for licentiousness of manners. The belief of a future life of happiness for good men and of misery for the wicked, which made so important a part of the popular faith, in the less enlightened but purer days of the commonwealth, was generally exploded, as a vulgar superstition by the learned and refined of the Augustan age. Even Cicero, though from some of his philosophical discourses we should be led to class him among those, who were sincere believers in a future state of conscious being, rejects the notion of a liability to punishment after this life. Nor was it that

he merely rejected the vulgar fables of the infernal regions. It was against future punishment in any form that the argument was directed, for it was against the fear of death ; and the whole force of it consists in this — that there is nothing then to fear.

But the prevailing opinion among the higher orders of society at that time, and long after, appears to have been, not only that the notion of future punishment, but also that of future existence was a popular delusion. The sentiment expressed so distinctly by Pliny was agreeable to the prevailing philosophy of the age. “ All men,” said he, “ are in the same condition after their last day, as before their first ; nor have they any more sense either in body or soul after they are dead, than before they were born.”* Nor have we only the testimony of antiquity on this subject. Shall we not find it uniformly the case in modern times, that those who have renounced revelation have seldom retained long their belief in a future state ? If such be the fact, it is one of great importance ; since it not only shows, that reason has failed of making the discovery of the doctrine, — it has even failed of retaining those in the faith of it, who had previously received it from revelation.

Besides those who expressly rejected the doctrine, I have said there were those also, who were full of doubt on the subject, or, admitting it in words, gave such explanations of it, as made it a question of little value and of little interest. If we bring together

* Nat. Hist. Lib. VII. cap. 55. ; Leland, Vol. II. 429.

all that is said by Cicero, at different times, and upon different occasions, we shall find how indistinct were his views, and how full of doubt and uncertainty his mind. A prevailing hope he probably felt, that the soul would survive the body. But even *this* was not uniform and constant, nor does it appear ever to have risen to a high degree of confidence; sometimes it seems to have almost wholly forsaken him. Besides, his philosophical notion of the immortality of the soul did not include in it that of a separate, individual, existence. He was an admirer and follower of Plato, whose doctrine was, — that the soul does not indeed perish with the body, — yet that it loses its separate, individual existence, — returns to the soul of the universe, — is again re-united to it, re-absorbed into it, and becomes what it was before its connexion with the body.

That Socrates was a real believer in the doctrine of a future life, has been supposed by those, who have allowed it to no other individual among the philosophers of heathen antiquity. That he did entertain a strong prevailing hope, there can be no doubt. But as little doubt can there be, when we attend to his conversations on the subject, — that even in him this hope was mingled with a feeling of uncertainty and solicitude. Nor was it, as he held it, a doctrine in which *all* had the same interest. Amidst the excellent and sublime things which he has said of the happiness of a future life, we are to recollect, that it was to be the privilege only of those few exalted souls, who were addicted to philosophy and refined by

science. As to the bulk of mankind, whether good or bad, they had no share nor interest in this glorious and happy state.

Besides this, he seems to have been a believer in the doctrine of a transmigration of souls; according to which, the soul of man is immortal, because it is a part of the Deity; because that is immortal out of which it was discerped; and because, when it leaves the body, it is to return to the soul of the universe, from which it was taken, — to be dissolved into it, — and to become again a part of it. But this takes place not immediately. It is first to pass through a series of transmigrations, in which it is liable to pass into beasts, birds, and fishes, as well as into other men. And whenever this refusion of the soul takes place, and it becomes again a part of the soul of the universe, a termination is put to its individual existence.

From the manner in which Seneca sometimes speaks of the happiness of good men after death, one might be led to think him a firm believer in the doctrine of immortality. But at other times we find him full of doubts on the subject. His sober and prevalent opinion was probably that, which he expresses as furnishing his highest hope and consolation, when laboring under a violent disorder, which he fully expected soon to terminate in death. Had he been a firm believer in a future life of conscious existence, this was the opportunity for his faith to manifest its supporting and consoling power. But no such support and consolation does he pretend to feel. The only consolation, gloomy and desolate as it is, which he pretends to draw

from his philosophy is this, "that he should be in the same insensible state after death, that he was in before he was born. That he should return to a state of non-existence. Death," said he, "is not to be. What that is I already know. That shall be after me, which was before me. If there be any suffering in this, we must needs have experienced it before we came into the light. But we then felt none. Would you think," he asks, "that the candle is in a worse condition after it is extinguished, than before it was lighted? We also, are lighted and extinguished. We suffer something in the interval between these, but both before and after there is a profound security. Whatever was before us is death. For where is the difference between not beginning to be at all, and ceasing to exist? The effect of both is the same, not to be. No sense of evil can reach to him that is dead, because nothing can hurt him who is not." *

How different this language of the Roman moralist to his friend Lucilius, from the consolations suggested by Paul, on a similar occasion, to his mourning friends at Thessalonica. "I would not have you ignorant brethren, concerning them who are asleep, that ye sorrow not as others, who have no hope. For, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again; even so them also, who sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him. For he, who raised up the Lord Jesus, will raise up us also by Jesus, and will present us with you." And

* Sen. Epist. LV., to Lucilius.

how different also from the consolations applied by this same apostle to himself, in the expected near approach of death. "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day."

I have confined myself to a very brief view of the subject.* But it has been sufficient to render it at least probable, that the belief of a future life and retribution, prevalent as the popular faith in the ancient heathen nations, was neither the discovery of human reason, nor the invention of imposture, but the imperfect remains of that early revelation, which the Scriptures inform us was actually made to the first inhabitants of the earth. For we have seen, that philosophy, instead of teaching the doctrine, has been

* There is a difficulty in precisely ascertaining what were the real opinions of the ancient sages upon this, as well as upon many other subjects; and upon this perhaps more than upon any other. The difficulty arises from a known principle, common to most of them, that they were to teach the world, not what was true, but what was useful. Now, by the avowal of such a principle, or the knowledge, that they actually thought it their duty to teach, what they did not believe to be true, if they were satisfied of its utility, it is rendered sometimes impossible to distinguish, when they delivered doctrines because they believed them to be true, and when, merely because they thought them to be useful in their tendency.

often hostile to it, and led to doubt and unbelief. The manner therefore, in which this doctrine was received and understood, is so far from showing that we needed not a revelation to give us light and assurance on this subject, that it is one of the strongest circumstances to show the necessity and the value of such a revelation.

CHAPTER XXV.

MORALS IN THE HEATHEN WORLD.

WE have seen, with respect to *doctrine*, how exceedingly defective, and false, and corrupt, has been the theology of all people uninstructed by revelation ; yet how fully the most important truths of pure religion accord with those views, to which we seem naturally led in pursuing the light of nature.

I shall now inquire in a similar manner respecting the *duties* of natural religion : —

1. What knowledge on the subject reason has actually given to people, who have enjoyed no other light.

2. What discoveries reason is capable of making on the subject, if properly directed, and faithfully employed.

What then has been the practical religion among all people, where the light of revelation has been wanted ? The popular religion always followed the popular theology, and resembled it in its principal features. It were vain and unreasonable to expect it to be more consistent or more pure. I speak not of actual practice, but of practical principles ; and of these, it may be asserted with confidence, that they will take their character from the character that is attributed to the object or objects of worship. The actual practice of men,

whatever be their religion, may, from various causes, be either more or less correct, than their principles ; — but their principles of action themselves will correspond exactly to the nature of their theology. “ All people,” as a prophet has said, “ will walk, every one in the name of his God.” That is, his principles of action, his ideas of duty, his scheme of morality, will correspond with his notions of the Being, who is the object of his worship.

Agreeable to this has been the experience of all ages, and the testimony of all history. The notions which men have entertained of their duty to superior beings have been superstitious, or absurd, or immoral and impure, according to the attributes, with which they have invested those beings. What else was to be expected ? What, but that the object of worship should be the object of imitation ? What was to be expected, but a gay and licentious, or a gloomy and ferocious morality, according as the voluptuous, or the fierce and vindictive passions prevailed in the character attributed to the object of their worship ?

Another consideration of great importance is, that in heathen countries religion and morality have been usually considered as perfectly distinct and unconnected. Instead of that close and intimate union, which belongs to them, they have been rudely divorced ; and the service of the gods, and a virtuous life, have been reckoned as unrelated and independent things ; the one consisting of sacrifices, rites, and forms of worship, having no necessary relation to a virtuous life ; the other, of a system of ethical rules, not founded on reli-

gious obligation. I do not mean, that this relation of religion to morality has been wholly and universally overlooked. It was understood and maintained by some of the wisest and purest of the ancient heathen moralists. What I would state is, that this relation is not recognised, and does not appear, in the popular religion or the public rites of any ancient people, Jews and Christians excepted.

Even of the philosophers and moralists, one only seems to have had such a clear and just view on this subject, as to found a system of morals expressly on religion as its basis. That one was Socrates. Of him it is asserted, "That he established all his precepts on one sure and steady basis ; — that in his discourses he connected the moral maxims, fitted to regulate the conduct of mankind, with sublime conceptions respecting the character and government of a Supreme Being. The first principles of virtuous conduct, which are common to all mankind, are, according to him, laws of God ; and a conclusive argument, by which he supports this opinion, is, that no man departs from these principles with impunity. It is frequently possible, says he, for men to screen themselves from the penalty of human laws, but no man can be unjust or ungrateful without suffering for his crime ; hence, I conclude, that these laws must have proceeded from a more excellent legislator than man."

It appears thus, that Socrates did make religion the basis of morals. The system also, which he taught, is represented as partaking of the perfection of the foundation on which it was erected. It was in a high de-

gree elevated and pure, and perhaps bore a nearer resemblance to the precepts of the Gospel, than is to be found in any of the other ancient philosophers. For, as to all the other philosophers, — though excellent principles of morality and rules of life were to be found in their instructions ; yet there must have been important and radical defects in their scheme, arising from errors and doubts in respect to two doctrines, the unity and moral perfections of the Author of nature, and a future life of reward and punishment, grounded solely on distinctions of moral desert. Their ignorance, their doubts, or their indistinct apprehensions on these subjects, could not fail to impair both their sense of the obligation of virtue, by resting it on an insufficient foundation, and the force of motive to practise it, by rendering the strongest uncertain.

We are taught by the best lights of history, that it was so in fact ; not in those regions only, in which, covered with intellectual darkness in other respects, we might reasonably look for correspondent ideas of religious and moral duty ; but at periods the most enlightened in the annals of Pagan philosophy, in nations the most refined, among people who had cultivated with most success the literature, science, and arts of the age. I might mention some of the laws of the wisest and most celebrated of the Grecian lawgivers, and the speculations of the most sublime of her philosophers, as authorizing the charge of a faulty, defective, and licentious morality. And while the teacher of the academy, to whom I allude, on the one hand, lessened the restraints laid on the voluptuous passions,

and removed some of the guards of purity ; he of the Lyceum, on the other, allowed undue scope and indulgence to passions and interests of another character. He lays it down as a fundamental maxim, " that nature intended barbarians to be slaves," and justifies the prevailing practice of the age, as not inconsistent with the rights and the duties of nature. He justifies, too, the Spartan practice of exposing deformed and sickly children, and recommends, that there should be laws to prevent their education and preservation. In this opinion he is not alone. He is upheld in it by Plutarch, one of the distinguished lights of a succeeding age, and particularly valued as a moralist.

Of all the ancient sects, the Stoics were the most severe moralists. In them we might expect to find a more perfect and unexceptionable scheme. But we are disappointed. Neither were the doctrines nor the examples of the great masters of that school without exception. They appear to have had very defective and false views of the obligations and duties of some of the most important relations, especially of the purity and fidelity that belong to that relation, with which all the virtue and happiness of the domestic state are intimately connected, and from which most of the social blessings and the order of society flow. In wholly proscribing the passions, too, instead of regulating them, the scheme was not founded on human nature, nor suited to human beings. Allowing no indulgence to the sympathies of nature, — no exercise for pity, — no scope was given for some of the most amiable virtues, the most suited to our nature and our condition, and the most perfective of the human character.

There is a large and important class of duties, which have scarcely been mentioned, if not wholly overlooked by the heathen moralists of all the several schools. Humility, meekness, forgiveness of injuries, which make so large a part of the Christian scheme of morals, and for which we can perceive so much reason in our nature, condition, and relations, have not only had no place among the virtues ; but their opposites,—pride, resistance, and revenge, — have usually been ranked among the dispositions, which it is right to cherish, and honorable to carry into the practice of life.

In fine, by reason of those peculiarities, which excluded particular virtues from the systems of the several sects, scarcely a virtue or a duty can be named, which was not excluded or undervalued by some one of them ; and what is still more observable, scarcely a disposition or a practice so unnatural or detestable, as not to have found an advocate among respectable philosophers and moralists of the heathen world.

I now repeat, what has already been observed, that, excepting in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, religion and morality seem never to have been considered as having any proper connexion with each other. How entirely distinct and unrelated they were reckoned to be, is perceived in the whole structure of the heathen systems of religion, and especially in the nature of their religious institutions, and the duties belonging to the priesthood.

We hear nothing of their ministers of religion being preachers of righteousness. It was no part of their office to inculcate the principles and persuade to the

practice of virtue. It was their office only to perform the rites and ceremonies of religion. — To secure the favor of their gods, or to avert their wrath, we hear nothing of their recommending repentance, reformation of manners, the practice of moral duties, justice and fidelity, in all their public and private transactions. Their resort was to more costly sacrifices, more exact observance of religious rites, or severer acts of penance and self-devotion. They believed public or general calamities to be tokens of the Divine displeasure, and sent for their punishment; and they believed that the recovery of the Divine favor, and the restoration of prosperity and safety were to be purchased by sacrifices, voluntary penances, and ceremonial observances. Repentance, reformation of manners, and attention to moral duties seem never to have occurred to them as the proper and the only means of securing the favor of heaven.

When the King of Moab was alarmed at the approach of the Israelites, and feared for the safety of his dominions, he sent to Balaam to come and curse them. Seven altars were erected, on which appropriate offerings were presented, in the expectation that by charms, enchantments, and sacrifices he might so conciliate the favor of his gods, as to engage them on his side, and obtain an advantage over his enemies. And it appears by the subsequent history, that after failing in this first attempt, in order to prevent the evil he apprehended from falling on his land, he had recourse, not to the reformation of his own people, but to artifices for corrupting the morals of his enemy.

The inhabitants of ancient Canaan were worshippers of Moloch, a demon fierce and cruel, and supposed to delight in the most bloody sacrifices. They thought no services they could render would make them so acceptable to their idol, as to offer up to him that, which was most dear to themselves. Hence their practice, constantly alluded to in the Scriptures, not only in great exigences, when the public safety called for uncommon sacrifices, but on common occasions, at their stated festivals, "to pass their children through the fire."

A custom so abhorrent from the feelings of nature and so irreconcilable with enlightened reason, was yet not peculiar to the land of Canaan, nor confined to barbarous nations; nor is it supported only by the testimony of Scripture. "It was customary in ancient times," says the Phenician historian, "in great and public calamities, before things became incurable, for princes and magistrates to offer up in sacrifice to the avenging demons the dearest of their offspring."

The Carthaginians, descending from the Phenicians, carried with them to the shores of Africa the religion and morals, as well as the commercial spirit, of their ancestors in the mother country. "In all emergences of state, and times of general calamity, they are said to have devoted what was most necessary and valuable to them for an offering to the gods; and to have thought human victims, and especially the blood of children, the most acceptable." Examples too shocking to be repeated, occur in the history of that nation.

The same method of propitiating the objects of their worship and averting great calamities was resorted to, in times of famine, pestilence, war, and all occasions of great public distress or danger, by the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans in the early periods of their history, the ancient Scythians, Gauls, and Germans, and the inhabitants of Mexico and Peru, in America.

When, at a later period, the practice of human sacrifice was abolished by law among the Romans, its place was supplied by another, less cruel and less immoral, but not less superstitious, and still more absurd. "At Rome," we are told, "the usual method of making atonement was a solemn procession, and driving a nail into the temple of Jupiter."

Ceremonies as absurd as this I have now mentioned, and practices as shocking as those which preceded, usual in all pagan countries, for the purpose of procuring the divine favor, are fitted to show how far mankind have been from understanding the intimate connexion there is between religion and morality ; between the practice of virtue and the favor of heaven.

Shall we now, from the view that has been taken, come to the conclusion, that for the conduct of life nature has given to those, who follow her light, no clear instruction ? has furnished no standard of virtue ? has taught no rule of life ? Before we come to this conclusion, will it not be proper for us to consider, whether the customs of the world or the opinions of philosophers are to be received as true and authentic interpreters of the religion of nature ? to appeal

from those, who are supposed to speak the language of reason, to reason herself? to turn from what has actually been learned, and endeavor to infer what she is capable of teaching, from what she clearly approves, in those, who have received instruction from another source? This will give us those principles and that system of duty, which, whether with strict propriety or not, have been usually denominated principles and duties of natural religion, as distinguished from those, which belong exclusively to revelation.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MORALITY AS TAUGHT BY THE LIGHT OF NATURE.

HAVING shown the defective and faulty character of the morality that has prevailed, where only the light of nature was enjoyed, I shall now endeavor to show, that, notwithstanding this, neither the principles of religion and moral duty, nor the substance of it are uncertain or obscure to him, who is ready faithfully to follow the guidance of the light within him. That there is an important sense in which those, who have not known a written law, are a law unto themselves, have a law inscribed on their hearts.

In the first place, let us consider man as an individual being, and suppose him placed in this world, the only being of his kind, in the midst of those objects with which he is actually surrounded, but standing in no other relation to them, but as they may be made to contribute to make his condition happy or the reverse ; — what are the duties pointed out to him by the light of nature ? They must doubtless be few and limited to a narrow compass, but clear and intelligible. They must be confined to the preservation of life, and the pursuit of personal happiness.

To seek the continuance of being, to shun whatever would endanger it, and to secure our well-being, are so urged upon us by the very constitution of our

nature, that it may perhaps be thought more correct to speak of them as laws of nature, than as duties of religion. When we consider, however, by what means these ends are to be accomplished, we shall find, in the choice and use of those means, opportunity for the practice of virtue, and scope for the exercise of those faculties, by which virtue is tried and improved. For to the mere preservation of life some degree of exertion is requisite, to its good condition, still more. For the former, labor is required to procure sustenance, and care to avoid injuries and to guard against dangers; and for the latter, there is ample room for the full use of all the organs of the body, and faculties of the soul. And were he alone in the universe, an individual, unconnected with other beings, this would comprehend the whole of his duty.

Now pursuing these ends of a solitary being, what are the limitations prescribed? As a sensitive being, to seek the pleasures of sense is a clear dictate of nature. But are they to be indulged without restraint? Is he to yield without reserve to the impulses of his animal nature? By the reason, which is given him as a guide and a restraint, where the senses alone would mislead, he may perceive, that unlimited indulgence would not promote the purpose in view. He may see, that beyond certain limits it serves to disorder the constitution; the senses themselves are impaired, the power of receiving enjoyment is diminished, and the active powers both of the body and of the mind become enfeebled. Moderation and temperance he accordingly discovers to be laws of his nature, which are not to be disregarded with impunity.

Again as an Intellectual being, he has duties, which nature and reason dictate. He has faculties capable of high degrees of improvement by cultivation. It cannot be less his duty to cultivate the higher faculties and seek the perfection of his intellectual nature, than to exert the lower powers in order to secure the safety and well being of his animal part. The fidelity, that belongs to the one, belongs not less to the other. If it be a sin against nature to neglect the one, it cannot be innocent to be careless of the other.

But man is not a solitary being. He lives in the midst of society, surrounded by other beings, and connected with them, especially with those of his own species, by many and strong ties. He cannot but see, therefore, that he has other duties, beside those, which he owes to himself. Nor has he any difficulty in understanding what, in general, those duties are. In respect to obligations before mentioned, which regard the individual and terminate in self, that course of action, and that indulgence and restraint of the appetite make up the course of duty, which tend to promote his individual good ; — not transient, partial, momentary, but his good on the whole. — In a similar manner, as to the class of social duties ; the general criterion is, a tendency to promote the general good. Those actions are accordingly perceived, without much reasoning on the case, to be right and suitable, by which evils are prevented, and the general good promoted ; and those principles proper to be chosen as the rule of life, the universal prevalence of which would produce the greatest sum of happiness, and best correct or prevent suffering and wrong.

Now, as in the other case, the permanent good of the individual (however the solicitation of appetite and present gratification might lead to excess) requires temperance, moderation, self-government, not unfrequently considerable degrees of self-denial ; — so in the present, nothing can be more clear, than that the general good requires the kind affections, gratitude, exact justice, unfailing truth, and fidelity in all our words and actions ; whatever partial and incidental benefits may seem to result from single actions of an opposite character, or to be found in single examples of a course of such actions.

I might go on to exemplify in numerous cases, in the several relations, natural and adventitious. But it must be unnecessary to show, how the social state is benefited by the prevalence of truth, integrity, and kindness in the common intercourse of men ; by offices of friendship, and the spirit of patriotism ; or how the true happiness of the domestic state is promoted by the domestic affections and virtues, conjugal fidelity, filial gratitude and obedience, parental care and support. There can be no doubt, whether a society of men, seeking their personal interest and regarding the calls of friendship, in consistency with the public welfare and general good, would be happier than another, where each member of the community should act wholly from selfish motives, pursuing his private interest alone, without any care whether it interfered or not with the rights and the interests of others. And as little can there be, as to the effect of all this on the personal happiness of an individual. Now if,

we are so constituted, and such is our condition, that our real happiness is advanced, by sending our affections abroad, and pursuing our personal interest always with a due reference to that of others, and in such a manner, as to be consistent with the general good and the rights of others; we can have no doubt what is the course of duty. The will of Him, who has so formed our nature and appointed our condition, cannot be mistaken.

And what is it but the known will of God, that determines what is our duty? The distinctions of right and wrong, of virtue and vice, we learn to make by a consideration of the different effects of our actions. Our moral sense is affected, we have a perception of fitness or unfitness, and we judge it to be right, or wrong, or indifferent, according as we discover in an action a tendency to produce effects, that are beneficial, or hurtful, or indifferent. This tendency of actions is the criterion, by which we judge them, and furnishes the rule, on which our judgment proceeds.

But if it be asked, why we are obliged, that is, why it is our duty, to perform or to avoid actions according to this rule, I know not, that a better answer can be given, than this,—that in the natural tendency of actions, we see an expression of the will and disposition of the Creator. Thus, in the first place, we see in the works of God a general tendency to good. We can perceive in everything, which we are capable of comprehending to any considerable degree, that good is the object of design, and that whatever evil is connected with it, is incidental to the design, not a

part of it. It may be inseparable from it, and such as to indicate, till we are capable of understanding the whole, defect in the contrivance, or imperfection in the execution; but it is never such, as to imply that evil itself was the direct object of design.

Secondly, we are formed with benevolent affections, to delight in scenes of happiness, to rejoice in the good we see, and to be ready to promote it; to sympathize in suffering, to pity distress, and to be disposed to relieve it. And we are so connected together, as to be called to the constant exercise of these affections. Not a day nor an hour of our lives passes, in which they have not scope, — in which we may not contribute either to the happiness or suffering of some other being; and in which we have not the opportunity of showing which of the two characters is predominant in us.

Thirdly, and which is the most important consideration, we are so constituted that our judgment of approbation or disapprobation respecting our own conduct and that of others, instantly, and as it were instinctively, follows this rule. And this judgment is invariable and universal. We may mistake in the application of the rule; we may not be always correct in the result, even where we have rightly applied the principle to the case in question, for want of full or distinct views of the case. But our judgment always proceeds upon the same principle, and has its foundation in the same part of our moral constitution.

Now, in these three things which have been mentioned, — the visible design of happiness, and ten-

dency to it in the whole constitution of nature ; the kind affections originally implanted in us, by which we are made to take pleasure in the happiness of others, and to sympathize in their sufferings ; and that moral constitution, by which we judge of actions as deserving well or ill, according as they agree with this disposition in our own nature, and conform to that tendency in the general constitution of things ; — in these, I say, we discover, not equivocal or doubtful, but distinct and undeniable, marks of the will and purposes of the Author of nature. There can be no mistake in pronouncing what is the will of God, and therefore what is our duty as his creatures, as to the pursuit of our personal safety, and of all the good that belongs to the state of being in which he has placed us.

When we have taken this view of the subject, — and it is one which most naturally presents itself, — we are prepared with principles and rules, and a criterion of duty, that might seem sufficient for our guide, if honestly applied, on almost all questions and all occasions. If in any cases in practice, we suffer the selfish feelings to predominate, where more generous motives ought to have place ; if we prefer the inferior present to the greater future good ; if we choose the individual in preference to the general interest, and direct our views toward single objects and temporary expedients, instead of proposing to ourselves extensive views and the attainment of that which will be good on the whole, the fault will not be in the rule, but in the application of it. It will not be, that we require

a better criterion of duty, but that we need to make a better use of the one we already have.

Let us now see, in conclusion, how the case will stand in a few instances, as it respects human duty under each of the two general suppositions which have been made.

Considering yourself merely as an individual being, independent of all other beings, when you consider the provision the Creator has made for your improvement and happiness, can you doubt what are the obligations it infers? Can you doubt whether it be more reasonable for you to stretch forth your hand and gather the blessings that are scattered around you, or to leave them untasted to perish? and to languish and perish yourself for the want of them, instead of enjoying the health and vigor and cheerfulness they are adapted to impart? Can you doubt whether it be more fit and suitable for you to pass your life in sloth and inaction, suffering the faculties of reason, memory, and imagination to be unused, uncultivated, and thus gradually lost; or, by cultivating with care and diligence, to exalt them to higher perfection, thus to derive from them high degrees and an elevated kind of enjoyment, and thus to rise into a higher sphere of intellectual being and action? And when you farther connect with all this the consideration, that these offered blessings and these improvable faculties are the gift of your Maker, can you doubt whether you should regard them as the expressions of his will, and as such consider them as pointing out the law of your being? Was ever sloth and indolence, the neglect of the

faculties, and the waste of opportunities, privileges, and blessings, a subject of self-approbation? Was it ever the additional madness of him, who, by sensual excesses had early destroyed the powers of enjoyment, impaired the vigor of his faculties and blighted the prospects and hopes of life, to approve a course thus fatal in its issues, and feel satisfied as if he had been answering the ends of his being?

In the condition and relations of a social being, again, are the great lines of duty unlikely to be discovered, or difficult to be understood, when proposed? Is the social, less than the individual man, a law to himself? Is it less easy to understand what dispositions and what course of conduct are due to your fellow beings and to society, or from them in return to you, than what you owe to yourself?

You see that such is the structure of human society, and such our mutual dependence, that coöperation, kind affections, and mutual confidence are necessary to the enjoyment of the ordinary blessings provided for the human condition. You see that without truth and integrity generally prevailing, human society could not exist; without union of exertion, and coöperation in carrying on common designs, the business of life could not go on; without the kind affections to bind men together in the several relations, leading them to the pursuit of some common interests, the parts of the social body, most necessary to the comfort of each and the safety of the whole, would no longer hold together. Can you fail in these circumstances to discern the will and to read the designs of Him, who has so constituted

the body of which you make a part? Can you bring yourself to imagine that you are fulfilling those designs and performing that will, when in any case you weaken by your example or your discourse that mutual confidence, which would be inspired by the universal prevalence of truth and integrity,—when you set up a separate interest, inconsistent with the rights and hostile to the interests of others;—when you suffer those passions to predominate, which disturb the peace and order of the world, and let your conduct be marked with injustice and cruelty?

The shades of virtue and vice may sometimes so run into each other, as not to be easily separated or distinguished; and the relations and interests of life may be so interwoven and entangled, as to render the course of duty in particular circumstances doubtful. But the general disposition which should prevail, the temper and state of mind that should be indulged, the motives drawn from a view of the manifest will and purposes of the Creator and Governor of all, which will accommodate themselves to every circumstance, can neither be neglected nor violated by him, who reflects and weighs his actions as a moral being, without some sense of guilt or defect, and some disturbance of conscience.

I shall next consider what may be known of human duty, under the third aspect in which the condition and relations of man may be viewed, as a creature of God.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DUTIES TO GOD.

HAVING treated of our duty to ourselves, and our social duties, we are now to consider the duties of which God is the direct object, implied in the paternal relation, and the character of governor of the world. They may be resolved into three : a sense of dependence and subjection ; a spirit of habitual devotion ; a life of unreserved and unlimited obedience.

As to the first of these,—a sense of dependence and subjection,—can any views of the subject, or any reflections make its suitableness more clear and obvious than those which we have before taken of the divine character and government ?

Think of that Power, which brought all things into being, and upholds the universe and preserves its order. Think of that Wisdom, which contrived and executed the vast and complicated scheme of nature. Think of that Goodness, which, in giving life, has given with it the means of making life happy. Think of that Providence, which superintends and directs all that takes place ; which, ever vigilant and ever active, while it overlooks not the meanest, can manage the greatest concerns,—is equally interested in the affairs of an empire and the transactions of a village, in the motion of a planet and the falling of a leaf.

We look around us and above us, and see all de-

pending on an unseen power, and guided by an invisible hand. The eye, with which we glance over the works of the Creator, presents its images, not by any power of its own, nor by any which we have given it, or which we can either entirely command or fully understand. The blood, that carries life and vigor to each part of the system, moves on without the direction or even the concurrence of our will. That the organs of the body are in health and perform their office, that the faculties of the mind are sound and obey the will, that the affections of the heart retain their susceptibility, we perceive — and often by melancholy proof — is not of ourselves. And if these things, which make, in common estimation, a part of ourselves, are out of our control, how much more those which are external! How much more the many accidents of life, on which its well-being and even its continuance depends!

Thus, convinced by a thousand proofs, that in God we live and move and have our being; that without him we are nothing, and can do nothing, can possess nothing, can enjoy nothing; must we not deem it reasonable and becoming to maintain a lively sense of this dependence? Our best understanding and purest feelings dictate the propriety of making the habit of our minds to correspond to this confessed state, in which we find ourselves.

While those views of the divine character, which the study of nature presents, thus teach us to cherish a sense of dependence and subjection, they teach us also to cultivate a spirit of habitual devotion.

By a spirit of devotion, I mean, a lively sensibility to religious impression, and a strong tendency and constant disposition of the mind to regard and acknowledge God, in all that we see and in all that takes place ; not only to engage at certain times in direct acts of homage, and the performance of external worship, but in all our business, in all our interests, in all our reflections, to mingle some thought of that glorious and ever-present Being, who fills, surrounds, and upholds all things, who never loses sight of us, though we be mindless of him, and who, as our Father, can never be indifferent to our interests, nor as a master, to our conduct.

The reasons for this are too many and too obvious to require to be formally enforced. Can we need to be reminded again of the perfections of God, in order to convince us what are our obligations, in order to give us a practical sense of the unceasing care of his providence, and the innumerable blessings which his goodness supplies ? Can we need to be told, that all our interests are in his keeping, that nothing can befall us without his direction or permission, that our thoughts and purposes, as well as our deeds, are open to his inspection ; that, standing in the relations both of a father and a master to us, the absolute authority of the one is tempered by the kindness belonging to the other ? Can we require to have pointed out to us the reasonableness and propriety of acknowledging these relations, of referring to them all our interests and wishes, all our hopes and fears ? and keeping them so habitually in the mind, that they shall give the entire

direction to the thoughts and affections and the conduct of life?

Where the spirit of devotion prevails, the occasions for it will be constant; no circumstances will be found to extinguish it, and no situations so wholly adverse that it will not find a place. We shall see God in every object, in every event, and in every thought of our hearts. We shall take delight in contemplating his presence and regarding his hand.

I shall hardly need attempt formally to support the remaining point, the obligation of unreserved and unlimited obedience. Every consideration which leads to the other conclusions, conducts also to this. Every topic of proof, that we owe to God a sense of dependence and subjection, and a spirit of habitual devotion, supplies also an argument and suggests a reason for a life of obedience.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PRAYER.

I SHALL endeavor, in this chapter, to ascertain what the light of nature suggests as to the duty and the efficacy of Prayer.

We mean by Prayer the formal and express address of our wishes and desires to God, whether with or without the use of speech ; and this we call the external duty, in contradistinction to the internal devotion, which consists in contemplations and feelings not formed distinctly into wishes and desires.

The propriety and reasonableness of prayer seems to be suggested particularly by a consideration of the universal and constant presence of God, and what appears of his power and his goodness. We are sure that we address a Being who can hear us, who is not at a distance from us, not ignorant of us ; but who is always near us, alike listening to the requests which our lips have uttered, and reading the wishes and desires which have been formed in the heart. We are sure that we address a Being, who is able to do whatever we ask, — a Being, who has no power above him to control or restrain, nor any defect to limit or set bounds ; who, having established the order and course of nature, can regulate at his pleasure those causes which he has put in operation, so as to accomplish his purposes and designs ; who has all beings, as well

as all events, subject to his control, so that he can, if he so please, give the direction to their actions, and take care of their interests. We are sure, also, of the kind disposition and benevolent designs of the Being, who is thus present to hear, and able to do all that we ask and more than we can wish.

Do we doubt his presence? Let us only imagine his absence, imagine him withdrawn from us, or from any part of his works, ceasing to exert his supporting influence and superintending care. Do we doubt whether he can know our wants, and be made acquainted with our desires? We have only to reflect that our condition is of his appointment, and that all our faculties are his gift, as well those by which we express, as those by which we feel our wants. Can it be that he is incapable of understanding our necessities, who has placed us in the situation which subjects us to them? that our desires cannot be made known to him who planted those desires within us?

Do we doubt his ability, when he knows our wants, to relieve them, when he hears our prayers, to answer them? Can he, who first created all things, and to whom all are subject, want the power or the means of doing for any of his creatures whatever it may be his will they should have done for them?

Do we doubt the kindness of his disposition, and the benevolence which should prompt him to regard our interests and notice our desires? Let us think but of one of a thousand of our blessings, but of one of a thousand of those provisions which he has made to promote our happiness, and all apprehensions of his

indifference to our state and regardlessness of our wants will vanish.

Without any further considerations, prayer would seem to be a dictate of nature ; and we might be ready to pronounce, that men would be prompted in many circumstances, especially in sufferings, in fears, and in dangers, to raise their hopes and address their prayers to God. But other considerations, nearly connected with these, lead to the same conclusion. All that we see, and all that befalls us, is calculated to teach us our entire dependence. But if we are dependent on God, and if whatever we are hereafter to enjoy or to suffer, must be according to his appointment or permission, nothing would seem more reasonable than that for past favors we should express our gratitude to him who bestowed them ; and that we should ask those blessings which we shall need in future, and exemption from the evils we dread, of him from whom we must receive these favors, if we receive them at all.

And this ground of prayer is again fortified by clear and distinct analogies. We seem to be placed by our Maker under a discipline from the first moments of our being, to prepare us for readily engaging in this duty, by our experience of the propriety, the naturalness, and the utility of it in analogous cases. While we depend for all things ultimately on God, we are yet dependent on one another. Scarcely a blessing is there, that God has provided for us, which is not communicated through the instrumentality of others, and which does not therefore depend in some measure on their disposition or their coöperation. Our con-

dition and the relations, in which we stand to one another, require the constant intercourse of friendly offices. Every day and hour have we occasion to give or receive assistance, to ask favors of those on whom we depend, or to listen in return to the requests of those who depend on us. Not only is it that each inferior looks up with some feeling of dependence to a superior, each feeble to a more powerful, the individual citizen to the government as a common protector and benefactor, the poor to the wealthy, the weak to the powerful, the servant to the master, the child to the parent, the client to the patron, the pupil to the instructor ;—the dependence is in most cases reciprocal ; and he, who is solicited to do a favor to another, has usually occasion to ask favors in return. If the poor man is compelled to ask the aid of the rich, he, in return, has occasion for the services of the poor ; and the child receives not more from the parent than he has it usually in his power to return.

Now, what we have occasion to remark is, that by this construction of human society, and these relations in which the Creator has placed us, we are early and through life accustomed to require kindnesses in answer to our requests, and to do them in answer to the prayers of others ; so that expressing our desires and wishes for this purpose, and listening to those of others, makes a very considerable part of our social intercourse. It takes place in earliest infancy, when the young petitioner can only make known his wants and express his wishes by his cries. And it ceases not, when, arrived at the other extremity of life, the use of

other language is again lost, and that of signs must supply its place, to ask for the last offices of friendship to fulfil the last demands of nature. What we experience is, that on the side of weakness and want there is a propensity to seek assistance ; and on that of power and abundance, to grant it. There are exceptions and limitations, but this is the general characteristic of human nature. So rare and uncommon are the instances of the want of readiness in parents to regard the wants and listen to the desires of their children, that a defect of parental tenderness excites our horror as something unnatural and monstrous. And so constituent a part of our nature do we consider pity, the humane and tender feelings, and a readiness to listen to the requests of those who call for our assistance, that our very language is framed upon this idea, and all defect in this part of character is called unnatural and inhuman. He, who shuts his ears against the cries of distress, is considered as acting against nature, and as having forfeited his title to the human character.

Thus, then, the whole analogy of nature, and the whole of our experience in the intercourse of life, suggest to us the duty and prompt us to the exercise of prayer. We readily listen ourselves to the entreaties of the necessitous. Still more prompt are we to do this, if they are at the same time our children or dependents. The disposition, which we thus feel in ourselves, we find in others. It is the general character of our race. And in conformity with it is the appointed means of obtaining assistance and relief

of one another. We ask and receive. We hear the voice of distress, and fly to give relief. The sufferer, unable to extricate himself, implores and receives our help. We find ourselves exposed to ills, from which it is not in our own power, nor in that of any of our fellow beings to deliver us. We experience wants, to the supply of which we and they are likewise equally incompetent. We are sensible of the constant need of what no finite power can bestow. Feeling these wants, and taught by all that we see and experience, that God only can supply them, and that if ever we receive the blessings we need, it must be from his hand; we as naturally direct our desires and address our prayers to him, for what he only can impart, as we ask a parent, a friend, a benefactor, or governor, for those common favors which it is in their power to bestow. Nor is it less reasonable than it is natural.

But though our whole nature, and all our experience, teach us the reasonableness and propriety of prayer, what have we to convince us of its efficacy? Though all be granted that is said of the divine character, still it is asked, what grounds will it furnish for the expectation that he will so regard our prayers as to change his counsels, or alter his purposes and his treatment of us on their account? Can we inform him, it is asked, of our wants, with which he was before unacquainted? and may we expect to persuade him by our entreaties to do that for us, which he would not do from a mere knowledge of our necessities, without our prayers? He has established the order of

nature, and that regular course of things, carried on by general laws, uniform and constant in their operation, by which all that regularity and peace and harmony are produced, which we see in the universe. Are we to expect that, for our sakes, he will break in upon this order, disturb this regular course and succession of events, and by the frequent interposition of immediate acts for particular purposes, defeat the design of general laws? What is right, it is said, we may be as sure as we are of the rectitude of his nature, he will do without our asking. Can we move him to do more, or to do otherwise?

Such objections have their foundation in mistakes, partly as to the kind of benefit we are to expect from this duty, and partly as to the degree in which benefits of any kind are to be expected.

It will not be pretended, that either nature or revelation authorize the expectation of miraculous interposition in our behalf in answer to prayer; nor do they flatter us with the idea of inducing infinite wisdom to alter its plans, or infinite goodness to change its purposes. They give no encouragement to the hope that every petition, which our weakness, or presumption, or short-sightedness may dictate, will be granted; nor that anything will be conceded to our importunity improper for us to receive, unsuitable to his wisdom to grant, or inconsistent with the general scheme of his providence.

And without anything of this, benefits the most important may be derived from it, and its efficacy distinctly defended.

In the first place, as it is the expression of right feelings toward the Author of our being, and under his government, so it has a tendency to confirm and strengthen, to multiply and perpetuate such feelings. The habit of prayer, while it expresses piety, produces it, and serves to nourish and increase all those sentiments of reverence, gratitude, resignation, and trust, which become the relation in which we stand to him, as our father, benefactor, sovereign, and judge. Its moral effects are thus of the most important nature, and we may well suppose, when we take into our view the moral tendency of the whole divine scheme of government, that these influences and tendencies make a part of the reason of its institution, a part of the considerations, on which its obligation is grounded ; a part of what are to be reckoned among its benefits, and the evidences of its efficacy and acceptableness to God. It is the precise ground on which we judge in all other cases, what is acceptable to God, and the object of his approbation ; namely, its tendency and influence. Why do we judge that any virtuous affection, and virtuous practice are pleasing to God, and the contrary affection and practice displeasing, but their respective opposite tendencies and influences, which, as they were his appointment, discover to us his disposition and will ?

But the influences and tendencies, which have been mentioned, are not the only benefit of prayer. All that we experience in ourselves and observe about us would lead us to expect, that the humble and devout expression of our desires to God, besides

the moral effect produced on ourselves, would have some tendency to procure for us the blessings which we need, and to bring down upon us the tokens of the divine favor; not by altering the course of nature in our behalf, but in conformity with it. To an infinite Being, who sees the whole scheme of providence at a single glance, this may be easy. He may have had a reference in the original appointments of his providence to the future character of men, adjusting his dealings to their desert, and with particular regard to their pious acknowledgement, or impious neglect of him and his government. Thus without altering his plans, or changing his purposes, or interrupting established laws, or visibly interfering with their operation, may he make the requisite distinction between the pious and the profane, and in the previous disposition of things, provide blessings for those, who shall ask them at his hand.

When he sends the refreshing shower on this field, while that is parched with dearth; visits this dwelling with the pestilence, while that is the abode of health; commissions the desolating flame to lay your possessions in ruins, while the neighboring mansion stands secure; with the same gale wafts one in safety to the port he is seeking, and drives another far from his destination, or plunges him in quick destruction;—no special, sensible interposition of heaven is to be seen. The general laws of nature have had their usual operation; yet the purposes of retributive justice in rewarding piety and punishing irreligion, or the ends of moral discipline, in the trial of virtue, may have

been accomplished in each instance, with the same certainty, as if an angel from heaven had been employed, or the hand of God had visibly interposed, and produced the effect by immediate and supernatural agency.

We can discern reasons, why the instances should not be frequent, in which the particular effects of prayer should be perceived. Did they follow constantly and perceptibly, how apt would it be to introduce disorder, and put a stop to the business of life, by being substituted for labor, enterprise, and exertion ! It answers better the purposes of a state of discipline, that we should seldom have it in our power, either in our own case or that of others, to pronounce with certainty, that this event is the reward of virtue, or that the punishment of vice ; that this blessing was bestowed in answer to prayer, or that evil inflicted for its neglect. Nevertheless, if, at any time, in the practice of habitual devotion and humble prayer, you have been crowned with signal blessings, have experienced remarkable security from a common danger, or exemption from a common calamity ; though I will not say that you are authorized to consider yourself, on these accounts, as a peculiar favorite of heaven, to imagine that you are a privileged being, and have an influence over the counsels of the Most High ; or even to say with confidence, that this particular blessing was the special gift of God in answer to prayer ; yet, the same piety, which prompted you to pray, will certainly awaken in you a lively sense of gratitude. The same piety, which encouraged you to ask protec-

tion of heaven in the danger, will induce you to present your devout thanksgiving for the deliverance. And your experience, while it convinces you of the efficacy, and confers on you the benefits of prayer, will dispose you to persevere in it ; to make it not the occasional act, but the settled habit of your life ; and to place in God your steadfast trust and unfailing hope.

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